The Hudson Review

Winter 1988 $5 per copy

Jean Starobinski
Windows: Rousseau to Baudelaire

Joyce Carol Oates
Jekyll/Hyde

Carl Wooton
Ramblers and Spinners—a story

George Watson
Cities of Light

Temma Ehrenfeld
The History of a Little Girls' Game

POEMS BY Andrew Hudgins, Philip Levine, Dennis Sampson, Robert Schultz, Louis Simpson

LETTER FROM VENICE BY Sergio Perosa

REVIEWS BY Tom Wilhelmus, Robert McDowell, Wendy Lesser, Mark Jarman, Bert Cardullo

THE LIBRARY
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
JAMAICA, N.Y. 11439
FEB 9 1988

84
73361 64805 1

A magazine of literature and the arts

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Poet and the Dream Girl

The Love Letters of Lilian Steichen and Carl Sandburg

Edited by Margaret Sandburg

These letters, exchanged between the famed Illinois poet Carl Sandburg and his future wife, Lilian Steichen, were written during the first six months of 1908. Detailing Sandburg's travels in Wisconsin as an organizer for the Social-Democratic party and Steichen's career as a teacher, the correspondence traces the budding relationship from the pair's first meeting to their June wedding.

"These letters offer singular documentation of Sandburg's emerging identity as a poet and political activist. They provide the most revealing and compelling portrait available of Lilian Steichen, a remarkable person in her own right, as well as a fundamental force in Sandburg's life." – Penelope Niven, director of the Carl Sandburg Oral History Project. Illustrated. $22.95.

Alive and Writing

Interviews with American Authors of the 1980s

Conducted and edited by Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory

"The questions are always intelligent and informed, and lead to stimulating, frequently surprising responses, most of which reveal less about the mechanics of writing than they do about the originality of the writers' minds." – John Blades, *Chicago Tribune.*

"Intriguing." – *New York Times Book Review.*

Illustrated. Cloth, $22.50; paper, $9.95.

NEW POETRY FROM ILLINOIS

Lower-Class Heresy
by T. R. Hummer
Paper, $9.95.

Poems
New and Selected
by Frederick Morgan
Cloth, $24.95; paper, $12.95.

Cities in Motion
by Sylvia Moss
Paper, $8.95.

Local Men* and *Domains
by James Whitehead
Paper, $9.95.

Moon in a Mason Jar
by Robert Wrigley
Paper, $8.95.

Rembrandt's Mirror
by Laurence Lerner
Distributed for Vanderbilt University Press
Paper, $9.95.

Order from your local bookstore, or from

University of Illinois Press
c/o CUP Services • P. O. Box 6525 • Ithaca, NY 14851
607/277-2211

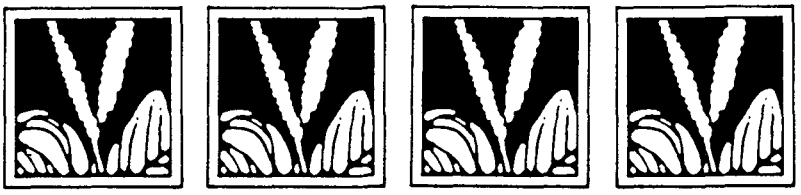
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Patriarchs of Time

Dualism in Saturn-Cronus, Father Time, the Watchmaker God, and Father Christmas

Samuel L. Macey

Moving from the deities of ancient Mesopotamia to the pantheons of Greece and Rome, from the Christian Father Time to the modern Santa Claus, Samuel Macey explores the dualistic gods of time through which man has ordered his expectations of both earthly existence and eternity. $25.00



Origins of Futuristic Fiction

Paul K. Alkon

Tracing the emergence of a form unknown to the classical, medieval, or renaissance worlds, Paul Alkon shows how works of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries established the terms under which such novels as *The Time Machine, Brave New World,* and *1984* would look to future worlds. $30.00

Southern Civil Religions in Conflict

Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights, 1947–1957

Andrew Michael Manis

In the late 1940s, as the United States turned from world victory to the domestic problems of race relations, blacks and whites in the South began to articulate two visions of America's destiny as a nation, two separate civil religions that would clash profoundly in the holy war of the 1960s. $22.00

The University of Georgia Press Athens, Georgia 30602

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Hudson Review

A magazine of literature and the arts

VOLUME XL NUMBER 4 WINTER 1988

ESSAYS

Windows: From Rousseau to Baudelaire — JEAN STAROBINSKI — 551
The History of a Little Girls' Game — TEMMA EHRENFELD — 584
Jekyll/Hyde — JOYCE CAROL OATES — 603

FICTION

Ramblers and Spinners — CARL WOOTON — 561

POETRY

The Hereafter; Green Inside the Door: A Memory; Bewilderments of the Eye; Fruit; Worlds — ANDREW HUDGINS — 609
January 1, 1987; In This Dark Pool, Our Marriage Bed; Two or Three Dreams of Spring — ROBERT SCHULTZ — 615
Refrigerator Queen; Particulates — MARK WILLIAMS — 619
1959; An Actual Wife — DENNIS SAMPSON — 622
These Streets — PHILIP LEVINE — 625
To Helen — JOHN RIDLAND — 627
A Visitor — LOUIS SIMPSON — 629
Boy Crazy — MAURYA SIMON — 631
Inheritors — BARRY SPACKS — 633
In Afternoon Light; Apparition — ALFRED DORN — 635

CHRONICLES

Theatre — RICHARD HORNBY — 637
London's summer season

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Film I — BERT CARDULLO — 647
"Working Girls," "Prick Up Your Ears"
Film II — MICHAEL GORRA — 655
"Radio Days," "Marlene"
Fiction I — WENDY LESSER — 661
John Updike, Abram Tertz, Vladimir Voinovich
Fiction II — TOM WILHELMUS — 669
Nadine Gordimer, Heinrich Böll, William Golding
Poetry — ROBERT McDOWELL — 677
W. D. Snodgrass, Sydney Lea, Jorie Graham

REVIEWS
Monroe Spears and the Judgment of Character — MARK JARMAN — 686
"American Ambitions," by Monroe K. Spears
On the Shoulders of Emile Mâle — JAMES FINN COTTER — 691
"Religious Life in France" by Emile Mâle

REPORTS
Letter from Venice — SERGIO PEROSA — 534
Cities of Light — GEORGE WATSON — 543

LETTER TO THE EDITORS — 696

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS — 698

INDEX TO VOLUME XL — 699

TO OUR READERS

A new book by a Contributing Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW has recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the book will not be reviewed in these pages, but is listed below for the interest of our readers:

MARCIA B. SIEGEL: *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey.* Yale University Press. $30.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORS: Paula Deitz, Frederick Morgan

MANAGING EDITOR: Ronald Koury

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Suzanne Pratt

ADVISORY EDITORS: Hayden Carruth, William H. Pritchard, Frederick Brown, Sonya Rudikoff, Dean Flower, Emily Grosholz

ASSOCIATE: Vincent M. Macchia

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Marcia B. Siegel *(Dance)*, Robert S. Clark *(Music)*, Richard Hornby *(Theatre)*

THE HUDSON REVIEW is published quarterly by The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10021. It is a member of The Council of Literary Magazines, and is indexed in the Social Sciences and Humanities Index. Book reviews are indexed in Book Review Index, and poems in Index of American Periodical Verse.

Subscription $18.00 per year in U. S.; foreign including Canada $21.00. Single copy $5.00. Special rate for bulk orders. U. S. A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, Ohio 44870. Library subscriptions in England: Periodicals Division, B. H. Blackwell Ltd., P. O. Box 40, Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford. Back issues and reprints of Volumes I—XXXVIII available from AMS Press, Inc., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N. Y. 10003. Microfilms of Volumes I—XXXVIII available from University Microfilms, Inc., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. We handle directly all requests for permission to photocopy.

We urge individual and library subscribers to inform us promptly of address changes to insure the continuity of their subscriptions. Claims for missing issues will not be considered after one year from date of publication. We regret that we cannot provide refunds on canceled subscriptions.

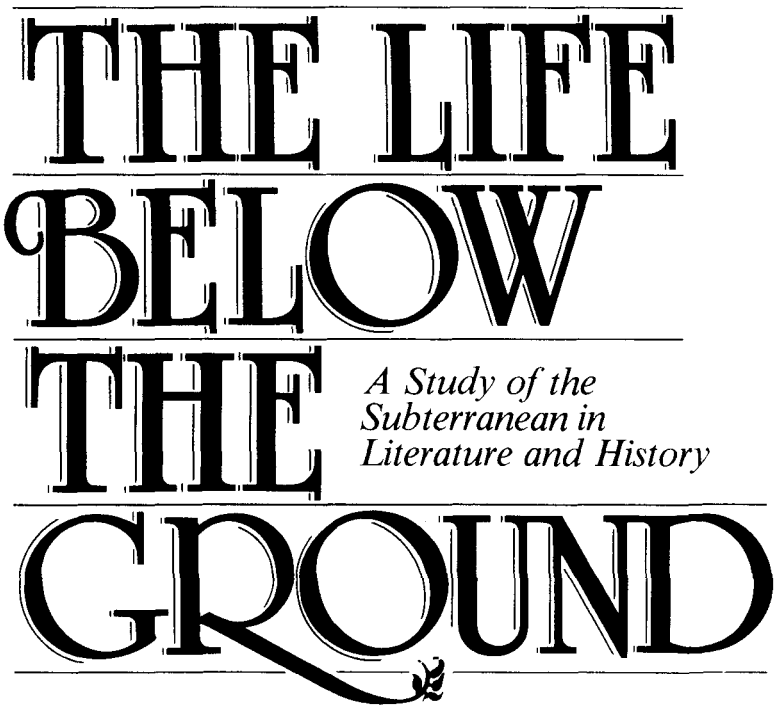
Unsolicited mss will be read according to the following schedule: *Nonfiction*: January 1 through March 31, and October 1 through December 31; *Poetry*: April 1 through September 30; *Fiction*: June 1 through November 30. Unsolicited mss received at other times will be returned unread. Manuscripts submitted by subscribers who so identify themselves will be read throughout the year. Manuscripts will not be returned nor will inquiries be answered unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editors.

Printed in the United States of America. Second Class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Registered U. S. Patent Office.

Copyright © 1988 by The Hudson Review, Inc. ISSN 0018-702X

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WENDY LESSER

"Wendy Lesser has written a *tour de force*"

"She has illuminated and made one infinitely more conscious of literary uses of enclosures from womb to tomb, as well as other ways in which the underground figures in the rest of life. The world below has now come to consciousness."
— *Peter Stansky*

"Fascinating and of great originality"

"It is, in more senses than one, a very *central* book. And it has the energy of a passion to go to the center. To go there always requires passion." — *John Berger*

"An original and entertaining piece of literary exploration, full of surprising bits of knowledge, lore and insight." — *Irving Howe*

Just published. Available at better bookstores.

Faber and Faber 50 Cross Street, Winchester, MA 01890

ff

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reports:

Letter from Venice

DEAR H,

The celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the *acqua alta*, the flood that well-nigh annihilated Venice on November 4, 1966, had a strange, uncanny, surrealistic air. I use the word "celebrations" advisedly. One would have expected the city—and indeed, the State—to go into mourning, to dress in sackcloth and ashes. Instead, it seemed as if notables and political bosses, experts and members of the press flocked to the city for a festive occasion, for the anniversary of a successful event, to celebrate the mere fact of survival. I had almost the impression (or was it an illusion?) of seeing banners flying in the wind above the city, as when the victorious armies of the *Serenissima* brought home the spoils.

The eerie, uncanny, disturbing atmosphere of celebration was increased by the fact that the then Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, presided over a solemn meeting of the "Consiglio dei Dieci" in the Ducal Palace—the *comitatone* of ten people, as it is more prosaically called—to which the second special law for Venice of 1984 (a first one in 1973 had failed to produce results) entrusted the *salvaguardia*, the saving and the preservation of the city against past, present and foreseeable future catastrophes.

I am forcefully reminded of the title of Thomas Otway's somber play, *Venice Preserved*—a nice metaphor for what in twenty years was rather discussed than accomplished, debated rather than set in motion. A profusion of words, reports, proposals and counterproposals filled those years. The very fact that a second special law was passed only in 1984 is a clear indication: the twentieth anniversary was nearing, so at least a formal statement of intentions had to be made. Yet, in spite of the various floods—of *acque alte* (those in 1979 and 1986 were almost as bad as in 1966), of words, of ill-advised measures, of politicians and local *savants*—a benevolent Providence and a coincidence of favorable events kept the city miraculously afloat and make us hope for its physical as well as cultural survival.

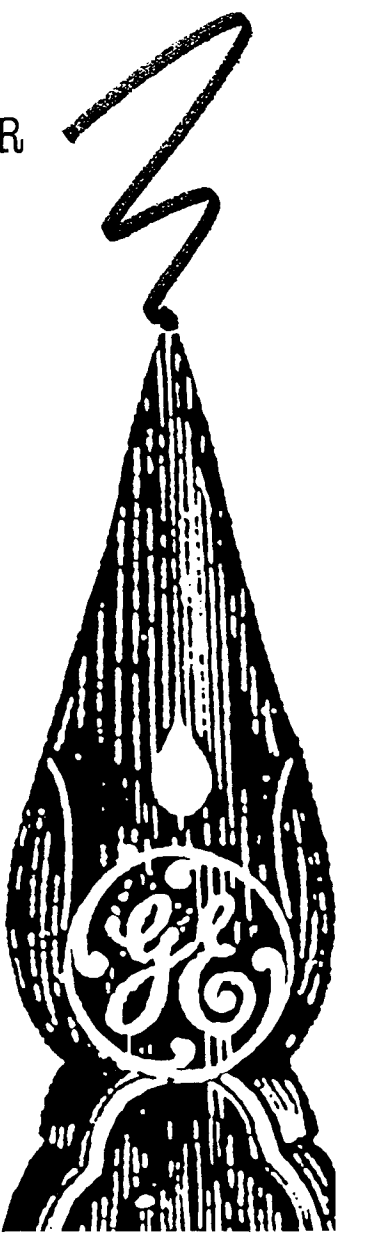
On the negative side, in these twenty years we had the opening, in 1969 (!), of the "oil canal," the canal for oil tankers which seemed to invite the inflow of waters and pose new dangers for the subsidence of the city. The materials resulting from its digging were to fill ten thousand acres of *barene*, those sandbanks which adsorb and discharge water at high and low tides and are indispensable for the ecological balance of the lagoon, so that a *third* industrial zone could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE COORDINATING COUNCIL OF LITERARY MAGAZINES

is pleased to announce the winners of

THE 1987 GENERAL ELECTRIC FOUNDATION AWARDS FOR YOUNGER WRITERS



- **Rick Bass** for fiction published in **Paris Review.**
- **Jon Davis** for poetry published in **Ontario Review.**
- **Rita Dove** for poetry published in **Callaloo.**
- **Erin McGraw** for fiction published in **The Georgia Review.**
- **Ron Rash** for fiction published in **A Carolina Literary Companion.**
- **Jed Rasula** for a literary essay published in **Sulfur.**

These awards honor excellence in new writers while recognizing the significant contribution of America's literary magazines.

This year's judges were: **Thom Gunn, Ewa Kuryluk, Louise Meriwether** and **Charles Simic.**

For information about The General Electric Foundation Awards for Younger Writers, contact: **CCLM, 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. (212) 614-6551.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be built on the reclaimed land. Rivers flowing into the lagoon after crossing the highly fertilized plains of the Veneto added to its chemical pollution. Finally, the number of inhabitants of historical Venice fell to 86,000—the lowest in centuries—owing to the lack of job opportunities and poor housing conditions, especially for the young.

On the positive side, the threatened third industrial zone was stopped after an upsurge of public protest. The most recent news is that those *barene* that had been reclaimed are now being restored to their pristine condition, to serve as in the past as breathing lungs for the lagoon. The subsidence of the soil has almost stopped owing to the closing of oil and water wells in the Po Valley. The restoration of palaces and monuments (almost every building in Venice is a historical monument) received a great impetus from the various international "Save Venice" committees. The city is indeed greatly improved in its looks, the buildings have acquired new luster (and sometimes, new usefulness); it seems as if a general process of embellishment had been set in motion, in spite of the ravages and the inconveniences of uncontrolled mass tourism.

The big question still hinges on the practical measures that will be taken or coordinated by the *comitatone* in the regulation of tides, the building of moveable dams, the anti-pollution measures, the economic life of the territory. I cannot go into technical details here—a further proof that matters are still *in alto mare*, in the high seas, as we say with a most appropriate metaphor—beyond reporting that a sizable consortium of industrialists and entrepreneurs, corporations and agencies, both private and public, appropriately called "Venezia Nuova," has been formed to implement those practical measures, mostly of an engineering and architectural kind. They are managerial and business people, the high society of national and multinational enterprise. Something, one hopes, will come of it, after the years of waiting and the out-of-place celebrations. Some positive effects are already detectable in the cultural sphere.

The FIAT corporation is part of the "Venezia Nuova" consortium—a sure sign that serious business is meant. Significantly, FIAT started also on another line (I hesitate to call it a sideline: everything that has to do with culture is central to the life of Venice). Two years ago, FIAT bought and restored, at high cost and with impressive speed, Palazzo Grassi, on the Grand Canal, formerly seat of the Centro delle Arti e del Costume, and turned it into a cultural center, Centro di Cultura Palazzo Grassi, which is organized and run as a joint-stock company. Not architecturally, of course, but in general aim and purpose, Palazzo Grassi drew inspiration from the Paris Beaubourg, and Pontus Hulten, formerly of the Beaubourg, was appointed its artistic director. The architectural restoration and the interior decoration were entrusted to Antonio Foscari and Gae

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Palazzo Grassi

Photo credit: G. Arici and M. E. Smith

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Aulenti, who caused some uneasiness and dissatisfaction in doing away with nineteenth-century accretions to the building, but were effectual in making the palace resplendent in its pristine glory and well suited for elegant, *recherché*, influential exhibitions and conferences.

This new center has had a shock-effect on the life of the city. First of all, it posed a challenge to both the slumbering Biennale and the massive, expensive, often traditional exhibitions organized by the Municipality. What was basically involved was private versus public enterprise, private versus public expertise and organization; the contention that culture can pay, directly as well as indirectly, that it needs investments but also a strictly economical management. At the inauguration, Palazzo Grassi caused some grumbling and some panic, some undisguised irritation and some envious expectations. But it did cause its rivals—the publicly-funded Biennale and the Municipality—to start looking for private sponsors themselves, and it did act as a rock thrown into a stagnant pool (water imagery seems inescapable when writing about Venice).

Secondly, the cultural choices of Palazzo Grassi have been so far rather shocking and far from acquiescent. The opening event in 1986 (co-sponsored by United Technologies) was devoted to a well-publicized and wide-ranging exhibition of "Futurismo & Futurismi," of Italian as well as International Futurism. I believe the provocation was at least partly intentional: in the newly-restored Venetian palace, at the very center of the most romantic and languorous of cities, we were offered a celebration of polemical modernity and iconoclastic avant-garde, of an art profoundly tempted and tinged by technology, devoted to the myth of the machine, the destruction of the past, the new "religion of speed," the ideal of violence and ruthless war.

Marinetti, the prophet, chief inspirer and histrionic organizer of Futurism, had advocated "killing the moonlight" and proclaimed Venice the sewer of the world. At the exhibition, under glass, gilt or lacunar ceilings, among satin curtains and lace-like decorations, one was surrounded by everything that set out to challenge and explode the myth of the past, of history and civilization, and that called for reckless modernity. In the entrance hall hung the aery shapes of the first warplanes; from room to room one encountered a release and a celebration of energy, bursts of color and disrupting forms, the reversal of all codified beliefs in harmony and symmetry, perspective and pure contemplation. Here were the beginnings of the modern concept of art—rent, torn, split, fractured, violent and hallucinatory.

The exhibition brought together for the first time practically all aspects of Futurism and emphasized its international diffusion, its long-drawn-out impact in Europe as well as in Japan and North and South America. Futurism emerged as the only Italian avant-garde

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TWO FROM NEW DIRECTIONS

H. E. Bates

A MONTH BY THE LAKE AND OTHER STORIES

"Though virtually unknown here, this prolific English author produced no less than 25 novels and 23 short story collections. This sampler of nearly perfect stories, spanning his career from 1926 to 1972, should set readers clamoring for more."—*Publishers Weekly*

★ "Bates (1905–74) was one of the great masters of the British short story. . . . [He] often wrote of quiet eccentrics, of passion not handled gracefully. . . . Its humor, compassion, and deftly controlled structure will both charm and impress."—*Booklist*

"Bates's affection for ordinary people is one of his shining virtues. But he himself, as I knew, and as this compilation should make clear, was, is, far from ordinary."—Anthony Burgess

A Revived Modern Classic
$17.95 & $8.95

Antonio Tabucchi

LITTLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF NO IMPORTANCE
Translated by Frances Frenaye

"The 11 stories—admirably translated from Italian by Frances Frenaye—that make up *Little Misunderstandings of No Importance* exalt the senses, anguish over metaphysical despair and rhapsodize over fear of death, loss of love and lack of recognition, all with great sensitivity and skill."—*The Providence Sunday Journal*

"Tabucchi's ruminative musings will appeal to readers who care about the subtlest relationships among families, friends and lovers."—*Publishers Weekly*

"These stories are, for the most part, little triumphs of nuance and suggestion, complex feeling and hesitant action."—*Chicago Tribune*

$16.95

Please send for free catalog

NEW DIRECTIONS, 80 Eighth Avenue, NYC 10011

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

movement that crossed national boundaries and set a chain reaction in motion: it posited an international engagement and involved all cultural areas—from painting to music, from literature to architecture, from the theatre to interior decoration, from advertising to cooking (a dinner of Futuristic dishes was one of the side activities). It aimed at a global kind of artistic expression, at total and synthetic art, at a post-Wagnerian attempt to join words and sounds, visual and kinetic expression, the architecture of functionalism and utopian dreams. Above all, it extolled and exalted movement, the speed and chaos of the city (velo-city) and the machine.

One could admire the big early paintings of Balla (*Dynamic Penetrations of an Automobile*), Boccioni (*Rising City*) and Carrà (*The Funeral of Anarchist Galli*), but the real discoveries were the developments of Russian Cubo-Futurism (in painting as well as literature), of English Vorticism (where Wyndham Lewis joined forces with Ezra Pound in *BLAST!* magazine, and Jacob Epstein sculpted a prophetic *Rock-Drill*), and the impact of Futurism on high couture and advertising, on posters, furniture and the production of books. As usual with twentieth-century avant-garde, manifestos preceded and often pre-empted artistic expression: the Futurists were literally addicted to manifestos and devoted at least a score of them to every possible area—the cinema and the theatre, criticism and photography, lust and women. They still make exhilarating reading.

The time span of Futurism was also well represented, with its premises in the 1880s and 1890s (in particular Étienne-Jules Marey's *Chronophotographs* of human locomotion), its high point between 1909 and 1918, when Futurism literally prefigured and expressed the violence of the war years, and its postwar aftermath, with its geographical spread and crucial developments in Dada and Marcel Duchamp, among others. With all its early stress on speed, movement and the machine, its true legacy was also in a conception of art as game, as a playful and demystifying activity both connected with, and antagonistic to, modern technology.

Palazzo Grassi seems to have specialized in this line of inquiry and research. Its second exhibition, early this year, centered on the sixteenth-century freak-artist Arcimboldo and his portraits and paintings totally made up of natural objects and vegetables, and on his twentieth-century followers obsessed with visual distortions of the human face. Its third, current exhibition (supported by the Swiss foundation, ProHelvetia) is devoted to the Swiss-born artist Jean Tinguely and his huge, preposterous, haunting, useless and often self-destroying machines. "Machines" is the only possible definition of his works, which are neither sculptures nor mobiles (though he started with both) and aim primarily at presenting gratuitous objects in subdued or suspended motion.

There is a link, I believe, with the Futuristic exhibition. The ma-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chine in motion has been Tinguely's obsession since the beginning. "I am an artist of movement . . . with movement one could make things that were sculpturally unlike anything made before," he wrote in 1982, and he acknowledged his sources in Dada, Duchamp, Calder. He has always been fascinated with motor racing, and there is a strong element of theatricality and playfulness in his works. But working after World War II, in Europe as well as America, he has turned the Futurists' idolatry of the machine, speed and movement into an ironic or nightmarish obsession. He has learned that the hope of a mechanical universe has left us with debris and broken fragments, scrap iron and gnarled pipes, battered funnels, smashed TV sets and washing machines. He constructs his "sculptures" with them, adding gears, rusty chains, wheels and driving belts that barely sustain the effort.

Like the Futurists, Tinguely is a devotee of happenings (on memorable occasions, at the MOMA in 1960, in Piazza del Duomo in Milan in 1970, he erected elaborate, self-exploding machines, and mimicked atomic death in the Nevada desert). But he goes beyond them and their followers (the word "meta" appears recurrently in his titles: *Méta-Malevič*, *Méta-Kandinskij*, *Méta-mécaniques* and *Méta-Matic),* and his constructions express the disillusionment of post-industrial, technological society, no longer the kinetic ideal of the machine. There is a strong ironic element in his works, and yet it is shocking, disturbing, strangely captivating to see his huge and chaotic constructions in the diffuse whiteness and watery reflexes of the Palazzo Grassi halls.

It is an experience of total engagement, psychological unease and dawning awareness. What is left of our artistic dreams and ideals are rusty and obtrusive machineries in tentative, aimless and creaking motion, in precarious balance, in sudden bursts of activity. They seem to move for the sake of movement when all movement, to paraphrase Shakespeare, defeats itself with motion. In the great entrance hall we are introduced into a huge, broken-up, upside-down, revolving merry-go-round, with stairs leading nowhere and wilted flowers, buckets and a lonely rocking-horse. On the *piano nobile* we walk around a dramatic representation of a modern *Inferno*: a tangle of pipes and wheels, lights and shadows that play on the beautiful ceiling, puppets and peacock feathers that are suddenly made to vibrate by fans, a Mickey Mouse lost in bewilderment. Elsewhere, skulls of seemingly prehistoric animals thrust menacing jaws at you; medieval altars are reduced to a bare outline of pipes, to a few fluttering veils.

Some of the stuffed rooms remind you of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*; in others, enormous black gears seem straight out of a Victorian Science Museum, as if the pre-history of the machine had ended with its *débâcle*. Tinguely also exhibits (but the word is obviously wrong) machines for visitors to play and to write with, or to com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pose music with. All of them whine and squeak, sigh and pant: one is incessantly surrounded by noises that never properly become sounds, as the Futurists would have wished.

The high point of the exhibition is however in the nearby deconsecrated Church of San Samuele, where Tinguely has assembled all the frantic constructions he made out of the remnants of a burned-out farm (*Mengele*). In semi-darkness, against the barely visible apses and chapels, monstrous mechanisms slide and revolve, whine and push tentatively here and there, throw menacing shadows on the walls, reveal skulls and skeletons of prehistoric animals in their tight grip. The impression is of a gigantic torture chamber, of an apocalypse inside walls, of the nightmare and terror of a world which is both pre-historic and post-historic, that reaches beyond death and after civilization. The shock-effect is here complete. Yet the experience is unforgettable, as deep as organ music. In its broken state, the use of the machine for artistic expression can still arouse emotion, sound the deep sources of our human waste and desolation. As Pontus Hulten put it in the catalogue, we are faced with A Magic Stronger than Death.

In this sense, Palazzo Grassi seems to fulfill its aim of adding a further dimension to Venetian culture. That so far it has chosen to trace and follow the line where the machine and technology coincide and collide with artistic expression may be a coincidence—but it does touch and reflect on the very roots of Venice, where art *and* technology were needed to build this most wonderful of cities, and are now again called upon to restore it to life.

Yours,
SERGIO PEROSA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cities of Light

IN THE SPRINGTIME OF THE YEAR—the year being A.D. 1987—London followed Paris, which was bursting with pride over its new museum by the Seine, the Musée d'Orsay, by adding two museums of its own to its treasure house of the visual arts.

The first, the Clore Gallery for the Turner Collection at the Tate on Millbank, is half a mile upstream from the Palace of Westminster where Parliament sits. It is a long-delayed response to Joseph Mallord William Turner's legacy of his pictures to the nation at his death in 1851. The British state has been widely blamed for the delay of a century and more, but the blame in fact lies elsewhere. Turner's will was contested by his relatives; and it has taken well over a century of legal untangling, and the generosity of the late Sir Charles Clore, a millionaire shoe magnate, to sort it all out.

But there it suddenly is: a two-storied, L-shaped little building connected with the Tate Gallery by a short corridor and designed by James Stirling, who is responsible as an architect for the new city gallery of Stuttgart. Its exterior, which is fussily marked by a triangular green entrance, is already unloved by architectural critics; as for its interiors, they look decent but needlessly pale, efficiently lit but characterless and bare. Stuttgart easily did better than this. But on its walls, and for the first time, are the works of the greatest landscapist (with Constable) that England has ever produced.

Born a year earlier than John Constable, in 1775, Turner was the son of a humble barber in Covent Garden, in the heart of London, a quarter best known to millions as the locale of Shaw's *Pygmalion*, where a morning stroll once convinced Alan Jay Lerner to write *My Fair Lady*. Though Turner moved with the great and the famous, he was never of them, and was never much understood among his fellow academicians. A solitary man, his habits were secretive. Though he lived with two women in succession and left children, he seems never to have married; and his living habits were so mysterious that distinguished colleagues at the Royal Academy, which he served for years, would try to get him drunk in the hope of taking him home and finding out where home was.

A fervently academic painter, what is more, as the Clore Gallery finally demonstrates, with an astonishing number of paintings executed in the neoclassical tradition of Poussin and Claude. But that is not, in the end, what compels attention. It is rather his marvellously free use of oil—as free as if it were watercolor—that suddenly obsessed English painters as a new possibility in the first third of the nineteenth century. Where Turner used that new freedom to the full, as in vast canvases like *Chichester Lock* or *The Funeral of David*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wilkie off Gibraltar, the huge tonal contrasts between deepest black and airy white still startle and amaze like the hand of a master. Turner conquered Paris, of all places, with a show there some three years ago, in a capital that had confidently seen itself as the undoubted originator of Impressionism in the 1860s and 1870s, within twenty years of his death. That confident view is not now so widely held, even in Paris. The French welcome to Turner was patriotically generous, then, as well as merited, and highly unlikely until recent times; and it showed how the old cultural rivalry of three hundred years and more between France and England has now given place to a more relaxed view and a serene admiration of each other's merits.

Landscape is narrative with the figures left out, to speak historically; or if not left out, reduced at least to no more than impersonal "staffage," figures in a landscape. The new Turner museum in London is a bridge between old and new, in that regard—between narrative and scenery. It gives us both an academic Turner painting classical themes like *Agrippina bringing the Ashes of Germanicus to Rome* after the manner of Claude, and a Turner who with Constable stands at the threshold of the nineteenth-century landscape tradition. Not that Turner ever lost his sense of drama, even when he portrayed English or Italian country scenes; and he can make even Chichester—then and now a sleepy little Sussex cathedral town—look menacing and bold. Where Constable tamed the English scene into a garden, Turner saw theatricality even in its silent fields and streams. His new museum must above all awaken a sense of pride at what English painting once was. From the 1750s to the 1850s, as we are just realizing, England for the first and last time had the greatest and most innovative painters on earth—Gainsborough and Reynolds, Bonington, Turner, Constable and the first Pre-Raphaelites. Here by the Thames, a century and more after his death, one of them takes his lasting place, all his works at last collected under one roof, by the great tidal river near which he was born and died.

The second London museum, opened by Princess Margaret on 23rd April 1987, which is Shakespeare's traditional birthday, is the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden, set out in an old flower market only a few yards from where Turner lived as a child and next door to the bookshop (now a coffee shop) where Johnson met Boswell in 1763.

The outer scale is modest. At first entry, however, the visitor is greeted by a more-than-life-sized gilt figure of an angel blowing a trumpet, saved from the old Gaiety Theatre only a few hundred years away—a theatre long since demolished, and now a bank. Or perhaps she is nothing more than a chorus girl with wings, for she looks more profane than sacred, and the old Gaiety was famous for its chorus line early in this century and the number of its members

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The perfect gift. (Even for yourself.)

For a mere ten dollars a year, you can buy a wealth of fascinating essays (not to mention new fiction and poetry) for yourself or a friend.

In the past year, *The Threepenny Review* has published **Alberto Moravia** on poetry and the novel, **John Bayley** on Philip Larkin, **Maurice Grosser** on Harvard in the 1920s, **Elizabeth Hardwick** on Gertrude Stein, **Leonard Michaels** on literary talk, **Mindy Aloff** on Fred Astaire, **Steve Vineberg** on *Blue Velvet*, and **Marguerite Duras** on mothers.

The coming year will bring:

Susan Sontag on Italian photography
John Berger on credibility and mystery in language
Robert Hass on Chekhov's anger
Harold Brodkey on Jane Austen vs. Henry James
Robert Pinsky on screwball comedies
Richard Stein on Proust, Ruskin, and Pater
Edward Snow on Degas's Nudes
August Kleinzahler on S. J. Perelman
Diane Johnson on the importance of plot

So don't wait. Use the attached form to subscribe, and we'll rush the next issue to you.

Please start a subscription to *The Threepenny Review* for each of the following people. For gift subscriptions, please send a card announcing the gift. My check (payable to The Threepenny Review) is enclosed.

Name: _____ Name: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

_____ _____

☐ one-year ($10) ☐ two-year ($16) ☐ one-year ($10) ☐ two-year ($16)

THE THREEPENNY REVIEW

Please mail to Subscriptions, The Threepenny Review, P.O. Box 9131, Berkeley, CA 94709. (Enclose $8 extra for each foreign subscription.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who married peers of the realm. You walk from the golden trumpeter down a long slope leading underground and past a looking glass that once belonged to St. James's Theatre, against whose wanton demolition in 1957 Vivien Leigh and her husband Laurence Olivier fought a bitter and unsuccessful campaign. Then rooms of theatrical paintings, mainly nineteenth-century, and some odd memorabilia like a painted Drury Lane price list from the good old days when a theatre box cost little more than two dollars, as well as a collection of prints and costumes from Shakespeare to now. Everything, as its patron Donald Sinden has put it, except Henry Irving's jockstrap.

The museum has been a long time coming, and even a profession accustomed to waits must sometimes have felt impatient to see it there. Many of the contents were housed for years, in expectation, in a Kensington house, and now that they are laid out to view they look more heterogeneous than ever. The final irony is a Gielgud Gallery, named after England's senior actor, presenting over two hundred watercolor-sketches recently discovered in Germany to illustrate ballet costumes from the Paris of 1614–34. Important, if you happen to be interested in ballet in the reign of Louis XIII; and pretty in themselves. But the visitor is left wondering what in the world they have to do with English drama.

The truth is that London theatre, boasting the world's most famous actors and fifty-to-a-hundred live shows every weeknight of the year, is too lively a phenomenon to be anatomized into a museum. At least so far. Monuments are for the dead. But some day, if London theatre follows the Gaiety and St. James's, this little museum may turn out to be just what it needs. In that case it will want benefactions of paintings, prints and costumes from one of its great ages, which happens to be now. It will need to be succored and cherished—perhaps by us. Until that day, it looks an odd little irrelevance in the heart of London theatreland and in the shadow of its opera house, like a memorial built a little before its time and waiting its call.

Paris, meanwhile, which conceives of such matters more grandly, has just opened the Musée d'Orsay at a rumored cost of nearly two hundred million dollars, turning a disused railroad station of 1900, the Gare d'Orsay, into a vast proclamation of French art from 1848 to 1914. The effect, unsubtle as it is, is breathtaking. You enter, after waiting and paying, into a huge concourse where trains once came and went, now fitted out as a gallery of nineteenth-century sculpture under a high roof and dazzling light. Then you take an elevator, if you are well advised, to the top of the building, from which (before walking down) you look out across the river to the right bank of the Seine, the islands with Notre Dame and the lofty

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

View from the Musée d'Orsay

Photograph courtesy of the
French Embassy in New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heights of Montmartre: all to be viewed, if you wish, from inside one of the two giant clock-faces that still mark the extreme ends of the converted terminal. And there, at the top, are room upon room of Impressionist paintings taken from the Jeu de Paume, which once housed them across the river in intimate, dowdy familiarity by the Tuileries gardens. Now they look more highly prized than ever, and more expectant of pleasure-giving, as if reflecting a market value that has doubtless performed better than any stock or share in the past twenty years. They even seem smugly and silently conscious of it, against their fresh-painted walls.

Do not attempt it all at once. The Orsay now joins the Louvre, the Grand and Petit Palais, and the Centre Pompidou (commonly known as the Beaubourg) as the fourth of the vast artistic pantechnicons that are now the hallmark of Parisian museum-going. Try to absorb any single one of them, and you will fail at a single attempt. They are not to be gulped but tasted; and Parisians, deluged as they are by tourists between April and October, are quietly self-assured that only an inhabitant of their city will ever manage to absorb them all, and then only at repeated attempts.

One alarming aspect of the two-city contrast—the intimacies of London and the exhausting splendors of Paris—lies in their contrasting policies over charging. Almost all London museums are free. The new Theatre Museum, to be sure, exacts a small charge. But the Turner, being part of the Tate, does not; and the Victoria and Albert Museum in Kensington, which is the biggest museum of the decorative arts on earth, has recently opted for a curious system of strictly voluntary door-payments, rather like the New York Met, though it is failing to realize much in net income for its maintenance. In Paris, by contrast—Sundays usually excepted—museums normally charge for entrance, and they are nowadays as busy as movie houses in the great days of the cinema. A line can stretch around the block, two or three abreast, and you can spend an hour and more in one, at least in summer. The implications are disquieting for advocates of free museums, and one would rather not contemplate them. Do people only appreciate what they pay for? Has charging for plays and movies (it will be said) ever killed theatre or the film industry? And could art profit from the dignity of the ticket office by being taken seriously, or taken at all? These are awkward questions. Fortunately for London, there are practical difficulties about introducing French habits into England. Earlier attempts to defray running expenses, or some of them, by charging at the door of the National Gallery in the early 1970s, during the Heath government, decisively failed: partly on legal grounds, since it was belatedly discovered that some of the paintings had been bequeathed or presented on the strict understanding that they should be freely available. Most Londoners, and most visitors, hope that these legal objections will stick, and that it will continue to be possible to walk into the National Gallery, the Tate or the Victoria and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Albert on impulse and at will. But the sight of those huge crowds doggedly waiting to get into the Louvre and the Orsay by buying a ticket is none the less disquieting. There are few queues outside London museums, and they are seldom long. One pays for other benefits in life, after all, fresh air only excepted. And a painting is more like a book or a play than it is like fresh air.

The thought prompts wider reflections. The eighties are the great age of the museum, beyond all doubt, and there has never been anything like it. No era of mankind has ever seen the sheer volume of demand they now evoke: no other form of popular entertainment, if that is what museums are, can rival them in their power to draw. The National Gallery of London and the Louvre of Paris attract by the million.

The causes are widely speculated on and largely uncertain. Media publicity is likely to be one—especially television, which makes works of art available to millions for the first time: an availability that naturally excites curiosity for the real thing. Another is the inflation in art prices. When Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* made over 30 million dollars in Christie's of London in March 1987, that record-breaking price for a single painting was not only widely predicted by the press for weeks before the event but heralded by a special viewing at Christie's. The still life masterpiece in yellow was dignified there by exposure in an alcove barred by an iron grille opened and shut by a guard who filtered in a dozen visitors at a time—*Sunflowers* being the centerpiece of a dozen paintings and sculptures of the French school collectively worth a sheikh's ransom. Days before the sale, the atmosphere in that little alcove was already hushed and electric. Great auctions are nowadays media events, with New York and London sparring for world leadership in terms of total sales. And what is so highly valued demands to be seen. In that race, at least, Paris is far behind and London far ahead, its commercial reputation undimmed. An Italian will bring an Italian painting to London to sell it to a fellow-Italian; a Dutchman will bring a Dutch painting there to sell it to another Dutchman. For historical range and depth in trading in the arts, London has no peer.

This is the first age of mankind, what is more, in which most adults have been exposed, directly or by way of a close relative or friend, to the lure of higher education; and the lichen-growth of the college ethos in the last forty years has by now left the simple world of our grandparents far behind. Art-knowledge is now common—the desire for it commoner still. It infects the rich who seek investment buys, the not-so-rich who think about being rich, and the never-to-be-rich who look at masterpieces in the spirit of tourists crowding the Tower of London to gawp at the crown jewels. In this museum age of the Western world, the two greatest museum-cities, Paris and London, seem determined to outshine each other

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by contrasting styles as much as by tonnage. And, it is good to add, occasionally by mutual aid: to its own astonishment, the London National Gallery was recently allowed by the French authorities to acquire through export a magnificent portrait by Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon's painter—apparently on the grounds that a French master of rising reputation like David should be seen in the British capital as well as at home. Melina Mercouri, who thinks the Elgin Marbles should depart from the British Museum for Athens, might take note of patriotism in that positive and intelligent style. Meanwhile the Wallace Collection in Manchester Square, almost a mile north of the National Gallery, has recently redecorated itself with rich wall-stuffs, and looks more than ever what it once was—the town house of a noble peer—exhibiting the finest collection of French paintings anywhere in the world outside France, not to mention rooms of Dutch and Italian masters more distinguished than many a national gallery elsewhere.

The Anglo-French contrast continues, then, stronger than ever. On the one hand Paris, with its vast pantechnicons like the Louvre, the Beaubourg, the Grand Palais and the Orsay. On the other London, with the rich intimacies of the National Gallery, the Wallace, the Turner and the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. It is a contrast evidently built to last, and the planned extension of the National Gallery designed by Venturi and now on show there as a model suggests something humbly reverent of the existing structure, comfortable but far from bold. And that, after all, reflects a contrast in total city-styles: Paris notable for its monumental vistas, its riverfronts and its grand boulevards; London, that ancient collection of villages stretching back to the Romans, for the unpretentious cosiness of its narrow streets and picturesque corners where Georgian homes and shopfronts crowd artlessly together, as in Bond Street—higgledy-piggledy groups that utterly fail to impress until you enter their doors and discover how much, behind unpretending façades, they modestly hide. There are no grand boulevards in London except the Mall, which stretches, a single processional way, from Buckingham Palace to Trafalgar Square. There Lord Nelson, temporarily shrouded for cleaning, stands unmoved on his tall column to celebrate the defeat of France in some bygone age. But the truth is that neither side has lost or won. Two great cities of light maintain their ancient rivalry, after a fashion, and their ancient difference of temperament remains. Paris is grand, London cosy. But they contest the palm as friends now, and as neighbors, allies and lovers.

GEORGE WATSON

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JEAN STAROBINSKI

Windows: From Rousseau to Baudelaire

to François Bondy

I. Singing Under the Windows

Rousseau, wandering the roads for the first time, gave free rein to his "romantic" imagination. He followed the pastoral and chivalric example: he sought adventure in the countryside. Every castle looked promising. . . . "I would choose the most conspicuous window and sing under it, and was greatly surprised when, after straining my lungs for so long, no Ladies or Damsels appeared, attracted by the beauty of my voice or the salt of my songs."[1] The window is the frame, at once near and distant, in which desire waits for the epiphany of its object. It is the mysterious sign testifying to the hiddenness of the unknown damsel, but it is also a way of access allowing one's voice to reach her, and, if the curtains are drawn, if the shutters are opened, allowing one to see her and be seen by her. Rousseau, the adolescent troubadour, believed in the magic of song. But nothing happened to confirm this naive faith. The aging narrator, recounting the story, treats his illusions ironically. He has all the more reason for irony in that he later attracted the attention of ladies and damsels with more artificial and calculating methods than singing under their windows: with operas and novels. The time was past when ladies in castles could be delivered from their jealous husbands, in the depths of the countryside, by a singer of serenades. Such things belonged only to the theater. What could still amuse the public in the eighteenth century were the

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book II, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. I, ed. by Marcel Raymond and B. Gagnebin, Pléiade (Paris, 1959), p. 48.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

amours of gentlemen in disguise who sang serenades, or had them sung, in the town square, under the window of some young *bourgeoise* hidden away by her jealous tutor. Even then, Almaviva and Rosina had to be transplanted to an imaginary Seville, where it was presumed the voice could still carry its message through the silence of a propitious night.

Of course, street singers did not suddenly vanish from the nineteenth-century city. But they had to sing in courtyards, because the streets were too desperately noisy. The head of the "poor, pale boy" (a pitiable image of the poet) is destined for the guillotine; his voice is not heard:

> Poor, pale boy, why do you go on howling your shrill and insolent song in the street, which is drowned out by the cats, those lords of the rooftops? for it will not pass through the shutters of the floors below, the curtains of incarnadine silk you will never see.[2]

What the young singer hopes for is not love but alms: just a penny—something to survive on. He will not get it:

> Not a penny drops into the osier basket that hangs hopelessly from your slender fingers at your side.[3]

Shutters, window, curtains are insurmountable obstacles. The boy is condemned to solitude—from which the only way out is crime.

In this nineteenth-century city where the voice can no longer be heard through the din, an amorous glance (in literary imagination) is still sometimes raised to the windows. To be sure, this sort of communication, which presupposes the absence of other means, seems archaic in the midst of modern civilization. It is not by chance that *La maison-du-chat-qui-pelote* (*The House of the Cat and Racquet*) is a medieval structure. To a great extent, the interest of the painter standing in the street is determined, aesthetically, by the charm of the old building in which the pretty face of Augustine appears:

[2] Stephane Mallarmé, "Pauvre enfant pâle," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry, Pléiade (Paris, 1945), p. 274.
[3] *Ibid.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> A delicate white hand raised the lower part of one of the heavy third-floor windows toward the fixed arch above it, by means of those slides whose latch often suddenly lets fall the thick frame it was meant to hold up. Then the passer-by was rewarded for his long wait. The face of a young girl, fresh as one of those white calyxes that flower in the midst of the water, appeared, crowned by a frill of pleated muslin which gave her head a wonderfully innocent look. . . . There was a charming contrast between the youthful cheeks of this face and the age of the massive window with its heavy contours and black sill.[4]

Here, the window is literally a picturesque element; it stands for an older world in the modern city. The consequences of Théodore de Sommervieux's glance at the young girl in her window will be an admirable portrait, followed by a disastrous marriage. Between the realm of the image (the old window, the painter's art) and real life, commercial or worldly, the amorous relation passes almost without transition from illusion to disillusion: the old window turns out to have been deceptive. In the modern city, the romantic situation of watching under the window is not a preliminary to happiness. It is, from the start, tainted with misinterpretation, with misunderstanding. It is not certain that people who glimpse each other fleetingly belong to the same world or are meant to understand each other.[5]

II. Baudelaire at the Window

The fine essays of Walter Benjamin have contributed to a close connection between the nineteenth-century city—Paris—and the movement of *flânerie* ("strolling"), a movement with no practical purpose, open to chance encounters, to the unexpected, to the sudden appearance of monsters or marvels.[6] In

[4] Honoré de Balzac, *La Maison du chat-qui-pelote: La Comédie humaine*, ed. by P.-G. Castex, Pléiade, Vol. I (Paris, 1976), p. 43.

[5] The motif appears again in Balzac, in *Une double famille*. The role it plays in Stendhal, notably in *Lucien Leuwen*, is well-known. See the excellent study by Jean Rousset, "Variation sur les distances: aimer de loin," in the collection of essays on *Lucien Leuwen* (Sedes, 1983), pp. 75–87. Jean Rousset speaks of the *amor de lonh* of the troubadours. We will come to this model again further on, in connection with a text by Baudelaire.

[6] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* (Frankfurt, 1974), pp. 33–65. In *La Poésie de Paris* (2 volumes, 1961), P. Citron clearly distinguishes the two levels: garret and street (Vol. II, pp. 332–383).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paying special attention to *flânerie*, one may forget that such solitary strolling through the streets and suburbs is just one aspect of the modern individual's relations with the city. *Flânerie* takes on its full importance only when we note that it stands in contrast to another attitude, equally revelatory, equally rich in meanings: contemplative immobility, the capital passionately surveyed by a voluntary recluse from a high window. It is a question of two points of view on the city: one in motion, carried along by the flow of the street; the other fixed, spreading its gaze over the varied accidents of the urban landscape. And we ought not to forget that these two attitudes are two aspects of the melancholic's experience: interminable wandering, and a confinement that breaks off all active relations with the outside world.

In *Les Fleurs du mal*, the series of "Tableaux parisiens" opens with "Paysage" ("Landscape"), which formulates, if not an *ars poetica*, at least a personal program. We shall understand this text better if we compare it with other nineteenth-century texts which define the writer as a solitary man at his window looking out on the city. (The cliché of the "poet's garret" can take its place in this ensemble.) Among the works that have held my attention are "The Cousin's Corner Window"[7] by E. T. A. Hoffmann, and "Sunday at Home," the second of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*. In both stories, the spectator spends a morning or a whole day observing and interpreting the scene presented to him by the commotion of a marketplace or the comings and goings of a community brought together in church by the cult of Sunday. The writer, behind his window, is a detached consciousness: he sees all but does not participate. He takes in the play of appearances. A secession from the social group has occurred. In Hoffmann, the cousin takes pleasure in an ironic superiority, based on melancholy and poor health. In Hawthorne, between the religious duties that underscore the citizens' day, and the calm descriptive gaze that consigns its observations to the page, a discreet, almost impalpable divorce marks the sin-

[7] A French translation of "Des Vetters Eckfenster" appeared in Champfleury, *Les Contes posthumes d'Hoffmann*, Paris, 1856. The closeness of Baudelaire and Hoffmann has been suggested by Robert Kopp in his critical edition of *Petits poèmes en prose* (Paris, 1969). "Woman at Window" is a significant motive in German romantic (C. D. Friedrich) and Biedermeier painting.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gularity in which the writer takes refuge. Under the gaze of Baudelaire's lyric subject, the belfries and their "solemn hymns borne on the wind"[8] impose such a strong reminiscence of the "Christian day" that the time of the poem first organizes itself on the course of a day, before evoking the cycle of the seasons. The poet also has before him the emblems of a different age of civilization, a different organization of time: factory chimneys, the smoke of industry, the songs of the workshops.[9] He perceives them, of course, but he himself belongs only to the immobile time of his gaze. And he will pay no attention to that disturbance of historical time which is the *riot*. Instead, to protect the birth of the poem's autonomous universe, he will emphasize enclosure, he will shut "curtains and blinds." The window will no longer be simply an observation post giving one a view of the outside; it will mark an absolute frontier, its closedness will allow for the magic gesture that abolishes the outside, while one remains safely inside with imaginary seasons and stars.

For Baudelaire (as later for Kafka), detachment does not come without guilt. The inverse movement—charity, pity—is felt as a need, or a duty. But it happens, as if under the evil spell of the city, that the impulse of compassion can find only an imaginary object, and ends by turning back, perversely, on the subject himself, the sole final beneficiary of a movement that dreamed of reaching others. To express this drama, in which the confinement of the subject is intensified by the very energies that carry him toward an unknown person, Baudelaire needs only a setting made up of two windows some distance apart, he needs only a curtain and a candle.

There is a direct connection between the poem "Paysage" and the prose poem "Les Fenêtres" ("The Windows"). From his window, the poet of "Paysage" contemplates the city at nightfall:

> It is pleasant to watch, through the mists, the birth
> Of a star in the azure, a lamp in the window. . . .[10]

[8] Charles Baudelaire, "Paysage," *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. I, edited and annotated by Claude Pichois, Pléiade (Paris, 1975), p. 82.

[9] The association of "church belfries" and factory chimneys also appears in the famous description of Rouen in *Madame Bovary* (Part III, chapter V).

[10] Baudelaire, p. 82.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This distant window, seen from another window, is the same one that is looked into, in *Le Spleen de Paris*, by the poet-narrator of "Les Fenêtres." Everything seems to give this prose poem the value of a detail isolated from the panoramic texture of "Paysage." In the same way, historians of art often pick out and enlarge a portion of a painting:

The Windows

He who looks through an open window from outside never sees as much as he who looks at a closed window. There is no more profound, mysterious, fertile, dark, or dazzling object than a window lighted by a candle. What can be seen in broad daylight is always less interesting than what goes on behind a windowpane. In this black or luminous hole, life lives, life dreams, life suffers.

Across the waves of the rooftops, I see a woman, mature, already wrinkled, poor, bent forever over some task, and who never goes out. From her face, her clothes, her gestures, from almost nothing, I have made up this woman's story, or rather her legend, and sometimes tearfully tell it over to myself.

If it were a poor old man, I could have made up his story just as easily.

And I go to bed, proud of having lived and suffered in others than myself.

You may ask: "Are you sure this legend is true?" What matter the reality outside myself, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and what I am?[11]

The distant window frames an at once visible and inaccessible figure. The waves of the rooftops, then the windowpane, *separate*, while the light inside *illuminates*. The mystery of the window brings contraries together: it is a "dark" and "dazzling" object, a "black or luminous hole." It should be noted that Baudelaire generally attributes this coexistence of contraries to the fascination of the eye. But if the window attracts the eye, it is not itself the source of any regard turned toward the spectator. There is no reciprocity. The window is an eye that fascinates but does not see. Urban space, at rooftop level as at street level, presents a spectacle of estrangement. It is a setting for non-relation. It sharpens the feeling of solitude, and the longing to find a compensation for it—in art, in

[11] Baudelaire, p. 339.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dreams, in defiance. The figure that appears in the frame of the window includes enough elements to hold the spectator's attention: like him, she is a recluse (she "never goes out"); like him, she is absorbed in some task. An element of fantasy slips into the perception itself: how can the wrinkles on her face be seen "across the waves of the rooftops"? Nevertheless they are included in the *chiaroscuro* of the appearance, while the "something" she bends over cannot be read.[12] For the task remains indeterminate, as do the identity and history of this woman glimpsed in a later moment of a destiny that is surely marked by failure. To limit oneself to the mere noting of her presence would be to resign oneself to the opacity of the fact, to a deficit of meaning, to the inertia of the absurd. But the poet will not resign himself. He wants to recover the missing meaning by conjecturing it, by reinventing it: by reinserting into the duration of a story the figure caught in the isolated moment of a glance. This fictive complement, this fabulation can easily be defined, in our current psychological language, as a projection. Mental effort reinvents the young woman of the past in the "mature" woman of today. It recomposes a vanished person, and, as in "Les Petites vieilles" ("The Little Old Women"), the poet thus offers the decrepit person an impossible love—a love that reaches through the old woman to the young girl she no longer is but has never ceased to be, enriched now by a suffering that makes her still more attractive. In "Les Fenêtres," Baudelaire evokes the act of fabulation but not its content: he speaks of the act that invents a story, but not of what the story is about. The content of the tale remains indeterminate. What the prose poem brings to light, here, is not the reconstructed past of the woman seen at her window, but the intimate, private purpose that makes the spectator-fabulator the only listener to the imagined "legend." Such is the metamorphosis that urban civilization imposes on the venerable images of the troubadour

[12] To the comparisons usually made by commentators on Baudelaire, we may add the window (on the ground floor) observed by M. de Grandville (as he walks down the street) in *Une double famille*. Balzac multiplies details, some of which I omit: "In the evening . . . once the candle was lit, one could see through the window . . . an old woman sitting on a stool by the chimney-corner, stirring a small fire. . . . The pale, wrinkled face of the old woman harmonized well with the darkness of the street and the dinginess of the house." (*Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. II, pp. 18–19.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the lover standing under his lady's window. No hearing is possible here—the separation is too great. The poet must sing for himself. The same was certainly true of *l'amor de lonh.*[13] But the distant lady has lost all her perfection (except for the unknown feeling, perhaps of charity, that keeps her "bent over some task"): she bears the marks of destructive time; she is an object of love only for the melancholy or perverse reason that it is too late to offer her any amorous petition. This is, then, an *amor de lonh* that projects its phantasms not only toward a distant shore, but toward the inaccessible past, and which finds its fulfillment, through an illusory identification, in the emotion felt by the interpreter-narrator who constitutes the final addressee of the feelings he has developed into a story. The act of sympathy is not transitive: it does not actually reach others. To live and suffer in others is, for the poet, merely a moment in an experience that ends first in tears, then in pride and a heightened consciousness of his own existence. The distant window has served only as a mirror. The narrator makes himself weep; and as he tells us so, he watches himself weep, not without a certain "hysterical" exaggeration.

Thus the window and its inhabitant turn out to have been merely a pretext for an inward movement. A pre-text, let us say, since the attention paid to the distant appearance ought to become explicit in a story, whose tenor, however, is not formulated. In fact, this prose poem can be read as a parable of interpretation. The circuit we follow, which turns back to its place of origin—the poet at *his* window—closely resembles the circle of interpretation as I have defined it elsewhere.[14] Attention lingers over an object that promises to yield a greater meaning, if an interpretive effort is applied to it. Appropriate means ("tools") must then be chosen and an interpretive discourse constructed, at the end of which the object to be interpreted has become the interpreted object—a transformation which restores it, so to speak, to itself, enriched by all the internal and external relations that have been brought

[13] *Amor de lonh*, "love from afar," an idealized form of love, first appears in the poetry of Jaufré Rudel, troubadour and crusader, who flourished in the second quarter of the twelfth century. (Translator's note)

[14] "L'Interprète et son cercle," in *La Relation critique* (Paris, 1970), pp. 154–169.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to light. This progression, moved by my desire for meaning, watched over by my critical reason, does not stop at the object: to a large extent, it turns back on the interpreter himself. The interpreted object becomes, for me, a means of interpretation, an interpreting discourse. It enables me to read myself, to decipher myself. I become the indirect beneficiary of the interpretive energy I have spent on the object. But the circle is not a true circle, the progression is not a real progression, unless the object is maintained firmly in its quality as object, respected in its independence, maintained in its exteriority, challenging me with all its otherness. What happens in Baudelaire's text? The object, originally celebrated in its imperious presence, becomes uncertain, replaceable, expendable. First of all, hypothetically, the woman could just as well have been a "poor old man." The interpretive discourse—the biographical narration—acknowledges that it is merely a fiction. It scarcely matters if "this legend is true." And, in a denial of the pitying sympathy that drew him toward the recluse by her candle, in a movement of narcissistic pride, the writer exclaims: "What matter the reality outside myself, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and what I am?" This intensification of self-consciousness leads the individual back to his own personal world, encloses him in it, and allows him to enjoy the spoils that are his alone—and that are him. The unknown woman, on the other hand, first encountered by a gaze that she does not perceive, is returned to her total solitude and shares in the shipwreck of "reality outside myself." The writer's final exaltation is coupled with a renunciation, an almost sadistic indifference. To live in another turns out to have been a parasitic fantasy, almost a way of playing the role of the incubus in imagination.[15] The weakness of the object, its reduction to a simple image, constitute, as we see, the faulty link that prevents the completion of a true interpretive circle. We are left with a simulacrum; the poet remains the captive of a "dark and limpid tête-à-tête."

The city—as in so many poems from "Tableaux parisiens"—has thus furnished the materials for an "allegory," in which the poet has seen, lifted above the space of the build-

[15] Baudelaire attributes this role to himself in poem LXIII, "Le Revenant," from *Les Fleurs du mal* (Baudelaire, p. 64).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings and the crowds of people, an aspect of his own face. In the labyrinth of the streets, or "across the waves of the rooftops," through all the sights he has met with, he has never stopped pursuing that privileged stranger—himself.

[Translated by Richard Pevear]

Days on Earth

The Dance of Doris Humphrey

Marcia B. Siegel

A compelling critical biography of Doris Humphrey, one of the founders of American modern dance. Dance critic Marcia B. Siegel relates the fascinating details of Humphrey's partnership with Charles Weidman and her subsequent role as artistic director of José Limón's company, weaving Humphrey's life story around an account of her innovative choreographic style.

"Provides **important information and insights** into the creative life and works of **one of America's greatest choreographers.**" —Susan Bauer

35 illus. $30.00

Yale University Press
Dept. 662 92A Yale Station
New Haven, CT 06520

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CARL WOOTON

Ramblers and Spinners

1

It snowed all day the Monday after Thanksgiving. After supper and homework, my brother, Will, and I sat in the narrowly opened window of the second floor apartment where we lived and watched the older kids run their bicycles down Sweet's Hill and hit their brakes at the corner beneath us and do four or five spins until they ended up in the next block in front of The Hoosier Cafe. Bradshaw Morgan got more spins than anyone else. He never got less than four, sometimes six, and once, although I didn't see it, he got nine complete spins. That was the winter before we moved to Nadirville, Indiana, and Bradshaw was already sixteen.

Jerry McCloskey, a fat kid, came off the bottom of the hill, hit the corner, spun, and went down, sprawling, the bike one way, him another. The others helped him up, but not without a couple of them slipping and falling on the packed snow.

I laughed and said, "I can do better than that."

Will said, "Me, too."

I said, "I bet I could get six spins, at least."

From behind us, our older sister, Angie, said, "Bet you can't."

Will and I didn't know she was there, watching us, hearing us. If we'd known, we sure wouldn't have said anything out loud. She came closer so she could watch Bradshaw Morgan and the others. She was fifteen.

Will said, "I can."

She said, "You can't get six spins. You can't get any spins." Will was getting up to hit her. "You don't even have a bicycle."

The truth was more than Will could take, and he jumped at her. Angie yelled, and I grabbed Will and held him back. I really didn't care whether or not he clobbered Angie, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew if he did, I'd probably get the same punishment he did just for being there.

I sat on Will and told Angie, "You better get out while you can." She believed me and ran out of the room, calling for Momma.

I heard her say, "Will was trying to hit me," and Momma said, "Why don't you leave them alone when they're in there together?" and I knew our father wasn't in the apartment. If he had been there, Momma would have said something like, "Angie!" and our father would have been halfway down the hall already, coming to set things straight. Will struggled, and I got off of him. He was strong for ten.

We went back to the open window, but the bicycle riders were all gone. The snow fell harder, and the freezing air that came through the open window made my eyes water and hurt my throat when I breathed it in. But I didn't close the window. The streetlight catty-corner from our building shone on the tracks made by the bicycles. The falling snow was filling in the tracks, but I could see them as though they were still in the motions of being made while Bradshaw Morgan went spinning down the street toward the cafe.

Momma came into the room and said, "Shut that window, you two. You'll catch your death. I swear!" Will shut the window.

I said, "I need a bicycle."

She said, "You got a money tree?"

Will said, "They don't cost much."

I said, "You won't have to get us nothing else for Christmas."

She said, "Get to bed. We'll talk about it later." She said it in the tone of voice she used when she meant the discussion was closed.

Will said, "I'm going to ask Daddy."

She said, "He's got enough trouble without you bothering him about some bicycles we can't afford. Get to sleep. You've got school tomorrow."

After she shut the door, Will said, "Do you think we can get a bicycle for Christmas?"

I said, "We don't have a prayer."

He said, "I'm going to ask Daddy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wrote off any hope of finding bicycles beside the Christmas tree that year. I had heard enough talk about signs of coming hard times. Momma, in fact, had already said something about there being nothing but foolishness in wasting good money on a tree we'd just have to throw out. But Momma's talking didn't touch Will. Only a couple of nights later Will was true to his word about asking our father for the bicycles. If I'd paid a little more attention to him, I might have expected him to do it, but I never would have expected him to do it when he did.

He did it at grace. Whenever our parents had had a few days in a row without arguing about whether or not we were going to end up in the poorhouse, our father offered grace before supper. He never said anything more than thanks for good food and good health, but he ended it by indicating each of us should offer some kind of petition. My mother prayed for comfort for those mothers who had lost their sons in the war and for President Truman. Angie prayed for A's on whatever tests she had to take that week. I asked for new tennis shoes and help in algebra. I wasn't worried about an A like Angie was. I just wanted help! Then Will, with his hands together, his fingers extended out straight, almost whispered, "Please let me and Mark get bicycles for Christmas."

He said it softly and with his hands up against his mouth. Our father reached over and lightly moved Will's fingers down.

He said, "I couldn't hear that, Will. Say it again, a little louder."

"Please let me and Mark get bicycles for Christmas."

Momma said, "Will! I told you we can't afford any bicycles."

Will didn't look at her. Neither me. We both watched our father, half expecting some kind of explosion that never came.

He looked at Momma a half-second when she'd had her say, then looked back at Will, who still had his hands folded like he was thinking he maybe had better offer another prayer.

Then our father said, "What about Angie? Don't you want a bicycle for your sister?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Will bowed his head further into his clasped hands and muttered, "And for Angie, too."

Our father said, "Amen," and there was a sound like someone blowing out candles on a cake. That was the first time I knew I had been holding my breath.

Momma mumbled something about people thinking they could pick money like apples, but she didn't make any more fuss during supper about Will's prayer. Nor did she say anything when Will asked again for bicycles for Christmas at supper every day the rest of that week. But that Sunday afternoon, I heard her talking to our father in the kitchen.

Momma said, "You hadn't ought to encourage him to go on about bicycles. He's just going to be disappointed."

Our father said, "We'll see."

"See what?"

"Maybe we can work something out."

"You're wearing two sweaters because we can't afford to keep the heat turned up and you think we can pay for bicycles? You got a special kind of garden where you grow your money trees? Where are you going?"

"Downstairs."

Our father's business was downstairs. He made venetian blinds and sold them wholesale. Momma kept the books. They talked all the time about the business, but always as though Angie and Will and I were not there. Our father kept saying he thought things would pick up in the new year. Momma said things about ostriches and fools with their heads in the sand. I didn't understand probably half of what I overheard, but I knew business wasn't good. That was why the heat was turned down and we had to wear longsleeve shirts and sweaters in the apartment.

Momma didn't like for our father to work on Sundays, but he almost always did, unless they didn't argue or talk about how much things cost. Even I figured out that nearly every Sunday afternoon she said something to him about money not growing on trees, he was almost halfway down the stairs before she finished. Sometimes I wanted to ask her why she hadn't figured that out, too. But I didn't ask her, partly because I was a little bit afraid she had.

There was no grace before and hardly any talk during sup-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

per for most of the next week. Each meal grew sterner and more silent. I admit that even though I had refused to share Will's hope, I shared his dreams of descending Sweet's Hill at rocket speed and spinning through the intersection, and it seemed as though even the dreams were slipping through a crack at the edge of the stillness of those suppertimes. The only good thing about those times was that the kitchen where we ate was still warm from Momma's cooking.

During that week, our father came late to the table, ate his meal, thanked Momma for fixing it, and went downstairs. Sometimes I heard him come back after we had gone to bed. He and Momma talked low late at night, and I couldn't ever hear everything. But sometimes I heard him say things like, "I've got to believe we'll make it," and sometimes something like, "Christ, Goldie, I'm doing the fucking best I can."

Near the end of the week, our father came to the table first and sat with his hands in his lap while he waited for the rest of us to settle in our places. Will was the last one to the table. He came hurrying, and as he sat in his chair next to mine, he flashed some kind of paper at me and shoved it into his hip pocket.

Our father prayed his grace, and he surprised us at the end of it by adding a petition: "Please let the County Commissioners act fairly when they award the contract for the new blinds at the Old Folks' Home." His voice stumbled through it, as though he was embarrassed to be asking for anything more than good food and good health. He cleared his throat, and Momma followed with a prayer for all the poor people who wouldn't have a proper Christmas that year.

Then Angie said, "Please let us have bicycles for Christmas."

Momma made a noise sucking in her breath. Will and I grinned and squirmed in our chairs, and our father stared at Angie and looked puzzled. Angie sat with her hands folded like she was imitating a statue of an angel. I didn't know what had possessed her, but I thought real quick that I had better, in fact, be quick and follow her example.

I said, "Please, God, let us have bicycles for Christmas."

And Will: "Please let me and Mark and Angie have a bicycle for Christmas."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Momma said, "Do you know how much a bicycle costs?"

Angie said, "$29.95. Will and I found some in the Sears catalog."

Will pulled the paper he had showed me from his hip pocket and handed it to Momma.

Will said, "There, at the bottom. I want a red one."

Momma said, "You hadn't ought to tear pages out of my catalog without asking." She looked at the picture and said, "That's thirty dollars. Times three, that's ninety dollars. And that doesn't include carrying charges. We don't have that kind of tree." She ignored Will's open hand stretched toward her, folded the paper, and put it under her plate.

Our father said, "Goldie, let's wait and see."

Momma said, "We're wondering how we're going to pay for the next tank of butane and you want to wait and see about some bicycles that nobody can pay for. I swear, Ernest. Sometimes I wonder."

She said that a lot, but she never explained exactly what she wondered about. Will and I used to guess late at night when we were in bed and couldn't sleep, but we never did figure out just what she meant. That night I didn't think I would ever go to sleep. Almost as soon as the light was out, Will said, "I bet we get them."

I said, "What made Angie come around to our side?"

He said, "Bradshaw Morgan."

"How's that?"

"I heard Ruth Ann Parker saying Bradshaw Morgan made Patsy Jukeman his girlfriend last summer because she had a bicycle and would go riding with him in the country—all the way to Raccoon Creek and the hogback—anytime he wanted her to."

Angie made no secret about wanting to be Bradshaw Morgan's girlfriend, but I was amazed Will had figured it out, even hearing what he did. He thought girls should be treated like poisonous insects, and he didn't waste much of his time worrying about how they thought. But he had understood Angie this time, and he knew as well as I that our father was not going to dismiss such a prayer from her lightly.

Will and I stayed awake until long after our parents went to bed. We whispered in the light from the street lamp about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the places we would go if, when, we got our new bikes. Finally, Will stayed silent when I asked him a question and all I could hear was the sound of a car crunching the snow in the street below and, after that, the soft murmur of our parents' voices circling in the dark, cold air. Then suddenly our father's voice rose.

"Goddamnit, Goldie, all I said was we'll wait and see."

Then it was quiet for a few minutes, until their voices and sounds of them moving around came down the hall again. Sometimes it was like the thinness of the cold air offered no resistance to the sounds they made, and I pulled my three blankets tighter around me. The cold air and the darkness moved together around my head, and I had a vision of Bradshaw Morgan waiting for me in front of The Hoosier Cafe as I came down Sweet's Hill, hit a new glazing of ice in the intersection and went into a string of acrobatic spins that awed even Bradshaw. I was almost into the last spin right in front of the cafe when I heard Momma's voice get almost loud, and she said, "Ernest! No! It's too cold!"

Will had to make a Christmas list at school. He printed his name at the top of his paper and the words A RED BICYCLE in the middle of the page. He told Angie about it, and she helped him to make others, some with his name at the top, some with hers, and some with mine. They all had the single item, A BICYCLE, as the total Christmas shopping list for each of us. We taped copies on the doors to our rooms, on the wall beside the bathroom mirror, and even on the bulletin board downstairs in the office of the venetian blind business.

We got a tree, but we got it less than a week before Christmas, after they were marked down. It was small, barely as tall as Will, because Momma said, "A big tree wouldn't look good with only one string of lights." We made chains of colored construction paper and hung peppermint canes on the branches. Momma always saved the thin, metal ribbons that she peeled off the tops of coffee cans, and we twisted them and hung them to shine like shook foil when the lights were turned on. And in the last days before Christmas, we watched our parents' every expression and listened for hints in their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inflections. At night Will and I speculated about the meaning of their smallest gestures. He believed a Christmas bicycle was a sure thing. I agreed that all in all, the signs were good. I did not share his faith, but since Angie's prayer, I had begun to hope.

On Christmas morning we woke to the sound of our father yodeling in the kitchen. Sharp, heavy odors of fresh coffee and biscuits and bacon filled the warm air. When I threw off the covers, I knew Momma had turned up the thermostat. She was waiting outside the door when Will looked to see if there was a clear way to the living room.

Momma said, "Breakfast first."

That was her father's rule when she was a little girl. She called it a family tradition and there was no point in arguing against it. We ate as quickly as we could, and we believed our parents took a great deal more deliberate time than they ever did with any other meal. But finally breakfast was done, and our father and Momma went into the living room to prepare for us. We crept along the hall as far as we dared in order to be as close to the living room as we could be when they called for us. Then our father yelled, "Come on!" and Momma shouted, "Don't run!" and we nearly leaped the last short distance into the room.

Joy! Joy! The purest joy I have ever known. Three bicycles stood in front of the tree. Our parents stood to one side, and Momma tried to take a picture at the instant of our amazement. Amazement and joy! Hope fulfilled! Each bicycle had a large sign taped to the handlebars to show whose it was. Will's and Angie's were red, and mine was a bright, glisteny blue like a clear sky reflected in water.

Will flipped up the kickstand on his bike, jumped on the seat and started riding down the hall with Momma yelling and chasing after him. I followed, but Momma turned us both around and pushed us back into the living room. We had to open the rest of our presents, the ones that had come in the mail from relatives. Sweaters. Books. Socks. One at a time. Each had a turn. Cards with notes about how sorry they were we lived so far away from everybody. And the bicycles stood at the entrance to the hall, ready, their clean lines defining speed and flowing spins on the icy streets that waited

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for us outside. Then, after the last package of more clothes from Grandpa Rambler, we were ready to go outside. Momma forced us into extra shirts and heavy coats and gloves with warnings not to stay out too long, especially Angie, because it was bitter cold. Our father helped us carry the bikes downstairs.

I wanted to go straight to the top of Sweet's Hill and come down to the intersection, but Angie and Will wanted to ride around town and make sure everybody saw our new bikes. I fussed, but I went with them. It couldn't take more than ten or fifteen minutes to ride past every block in Nadirville. And it didn't take a genius to figure out what Angie really wanted was to ride past Bradshaw Morgan's house. In a little while we had a crowd that wanted to ride down the hill and do tricks in the street. There were three or four other new bikes besides ours, and every boy who had one believed he had the bike that would one day break Bradshaw's record of nine spins on one ride. We were halfway up the hill when someone said, "Look!"

Bradshaw Morgan stood at the base of the hill beside his old bike, talking with Angie. Then, in a minute, he started up the hill, and Angie rode off toward the intersection to wait for us. Patsy Jukeman, Ruth Ann Parker, and some other kids who didn't have bikes were there, too.

There was no way up iced-over Sweet's Hill on a bicycle except to walk and push, slip and fall, push and crawl. Fat Jerry McCloskey led the way, and it looked like he spent as much time falling as he did pushing and walking. The sky was dirty gray and looked like the snow ought to start again any time, except it was too cold to snow. The wind blew stronger at the top of the hill, and not even shirts and a mackinaw kept it from slicing all the way through me. Ruth Ann Parker's little brother, Timmy, went first. The rest of us followed, with Will and me somewhere in the middle of the order. One went, and the next one counted to ten before he went because nobody wanted a collision at the bottom. Will was in place, then suddenly he was hurtling down the hill in front of me and I was counting . . . "one thousand eight, one thousand nine". . . .

"Go!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A hand pushed on my back and the cold in the wind stung my eyes and took away my breath. I pedaled at first, then held the pedals in a coasting position because the wheels were turning too fast for me to keep up with them. The back wheels hit a rut, came out of it, and I thought I was going to fall, but somehow I kept up and headed for the bottom of the hill. I looked toward the intersection and saw a blur of people and bikes standing around, keeping the center clear, and then I was there. I locked the brakes, turned the handlebars and spun, two, three, and went down. My leg caught under the bike, and I skidded along the street until I crashed into the rear wheel of a parked car.

Someone lifted my bike off of me and someone else helped me up and another voice yelled, "Look out!" Another rider spun through the intersection. This one did better than I had, at least four and a half good spins and without falling down. I saw Will on the other side of the street, standing next to Jerry McCloskey.

"How'd you do?"

He said, "I was awful," and held up one gloved finger.

Jerry said, "He's too light. There's nothing to keep him going. You turned too tight and ran into yourself."

I turned the handlebars of my bike and looked at the front wheel coming around and thought I understood what he meant.

Someone yelled, "Bradshaw!"

And we looked up the street to see Bradshaw coming toward the intersection. Nobody understood how he seemed to come down the hill so much faster than everybody else. He turned his handlebars, locked his brakes, spun, spun again and again, and looked like he would have gone forever if he hadn't been too far to the side. He had to stop to keep from sliding into the steel posts that held up the metal awning in front of the cafe. Angie and all her friends jumped around him like he was some kind of war hero coming home, but they didn't impress Bradshaw. He right away started moving back toward the hill for another ride.

We tried again. Will didn't do any better, and I did worse, even though I didn't fall. We went again, and Will got two and I got a little more than three again. I didn't turn the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

handlebars so hard, but I leaned too far, trying to help the bike pull itself around, and went down even harder than I had the first time. But I got up and inspected my bike. Just two spokes on the front wheel were a little bent, not enough damage to keep me off the hill. Bradshaw got six really big, looping spins the third time. He looked as smooth and graceful as a figure skater.

We had started toward the hill for another run, when Angie caught up with us and said, "Momma says you've got to come."

She said it loud in front of everybody, and they all laughed.

I said, "Tell her after this one."

Angie pointed toward the building, and I looked up. The angle was wrong to see anything, but I knew Momma was standing at the corner window, waiting for us to show we were coming home. Everyone else looked up, too, and they all laughed harder.

Angie said, "You better come," and turned away. Will followed her.

Jerry McCloskey said, "You better go home, Mark."

He said it like he was talking to a real little kid. Bradshaw looked over Ruth Ann Parker's head at me and grinned.

I said, "I'll go when I'm ready."

We climbed the hill again, but this time I hung back so I'd be one of the last. Bradshaw was always last. The wind blew harder. It had gotten colder. My face had almost no feeling in it. I went down the hill and before I hit the bottom I knew I was going to do better then three and maybe better than . . . I turned the handlebars, saw the lamppost go by twice, then the breadbox in front of the grocery store, three, four, I was going into five, and I could hear everyone yelling and then I felt the bike go. I hit the iced pavement hard on my left arm, felt myself slide and heard a scraping sound somewhere away from me. Everybody crowded into the street to see if I was hurt, and they kept Bradshaw Morgan, who never waited a full one-thousand-ten, from spinning at all.

My father came down and helped me home. Jerry McCloskey brought my bike. I kept trying to look at it while my father steered me toward the stairs at the back of the building. The handlebars were twisted out of line and ends of broken

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spokes stuck out of the rims of both wheels. When they got it and me to the top of the stairs and stood my bike next to Will's and Angie's, mine looked like I had tried to destroy it.

My father said, "It'll probably be a while before I can fix it."

I might have said something if it had been just him and me on the landing, but I didn't say anything because Momma already had hold of my good arm and was pulling me into the apartment. The warm air of the kitchen where she had been cooking picked at my face and made little needles run up and down in my hands and feet. As soon as she decided my left arm wasn't broken, she made me drink a cup of hot cocoa. I waited for her to say something about the bike and about my not coming in when she had said for me to, but she didn't say anything. She just told me to go on and be easy the rest of the day because I had had enough of being out in the cold. I didn't argue, and I really didn't mind that the rest of the day turned out to be sort of like a thousand other days I remembered staying inside because it was too cold. It still was Christmas. Momma cooked everything. My father said my bike could be fixed, and I had made almost five spins on just my fourth try down Sweet's Hill.

In bed that night, Will said, "You did great!"

Momma turned the thermostat down again, and the sound of the wind blowing down from the top of Sweet's Hill made the cold air in the apartment seem even thinner than usual.

I heard our father say, "I can fix it, Goldie. I'll get some spokes when I go to Terre Haute for the County Commissioners' meeting."

Momma said, "I swear! A brand new bike torn up the first day he rides it. And it's not even paid for!"

The wind brought an ice storm the day after Christmas. The temperature went below zero and stayed there for the rest of the school vacation days. The roads in and out of town were impassable, so my father could not go to Terre Haute and get the spokes he needed to fix my bike. It did not matter much, because Momma wouldn't have let us out to ride anyway. Neither, it seemed, would anyone else's Momma. Will and I spent a lot of time looking out the window, waiting to see who would dare the hill with all the new ice and snow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on it, but no one came. Not many cars even tried the streets. There was nothing outside except the whiteness of the frozen snow that covered everything, and the cold, cold air we felt when we got too close to the glass of the windowpane.

We had been back in school a couple of weeks when Momma told us the snowplows had finally cleared the roads and she and our father were going the next day to Terre Haute to meet with the County Commissioners. She told us in the evening because she wanted us to pray the commissioners would make a right decision about the blinds for the Old Folks' Home. I left that up to Angie and Will and thought real hard all night and all the next day about our father buying the spokes for my wheels. I even tried to think of ways to get out of basketball practice after school in order to get home in time to help him repair the bike.

It was already dark when I left the gym. Running was nearly impossible on the icy streets and sidewalks, but I ran when I wasn't sliding. I stumbled up the stairs to the landing. My father knelt beside my bicycle, and he was fitting the last spoke into place. He had thick hands with short fingers that made him look clumsy when he worked with small things, but he inserted the spoke into place without any trouble. He stood and handed me the bike. The handlebars were straight. It was almost like Christmas morning all over again. I wanted to take it right then and ride through the streets to show everyone my bike was fixed and I was ready for the next run down Sweet's Hill.

Momma had heard me on the stairs, and she opened the door to the kitchen and said, "Supper's ready. We're waiting for you." The others were already sitting at the table by the time my father and I got there.

Our father prayed thanks for guiding the County Commissioners, and I knew that meant he got the order for the blinds at the Old Folks' Home. Momma said something about hoping we would use our blessings right. I don't remember what Angie and Will prayed for, but I gave thanks for the fixing of my bicycle and asked for the weather to get better. Then I realized we were having a Sunday dinner in the middle of the week, with dessert. Two freshly baked pies rested on the counter next to the stove. Our parents laughed and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

talked through the whole meal. They told us about the meeting with the County Commissioners. Our father gave a detailed description of buying the spokes for my bicycle, and Momma made sure I understood how much trouble he had had putting them in my wheels so I could be surprised when I got home from basketball practice.

She said, "I hope you'll take better care of your bike now. It isn't made for doing acrobatics."

She stopped short of forbidding me to ride with the others down Sweet's Hill. She didn't warn me of dire consequences if I played what she considered the fool again. But I understood that if I wasn't what she thought was careful enough, I'd be walking the rest of my foreseeable life.

I said, "I'll be careful."

After Momma saw that our light was out and the door was closed that night, I got up, wrapped a blanket around me and looked out the window at the intersection. It was dark. Someone had shot out the streetlight. The snow and ice were gray and looked colder than they did in the daylight. The chill came through the glass, and I hurried shivering back to bed and pulled up the extra quilt Momma had put at the foot. Will was snoring. Momma and my father were making the noises they always made getting ready to go to bed, except they were talking and laughing more than they had in a long time.

Momma said, "Oh, Ernest!" and everything was real quiet until I heard Momma making sounds, sounds like little moans, sounds I thought I didn't understand.

Then those sounds stopped, and my father said, "Goldie, everything's going to be fine, just fine."

2

That winter broke every record it could for being cold. No one went out who didn't have to. We even got unexpected holidays from school, but ten or fifteen minutes outside drove the bravest and the foolhardiest alike inside. The bicycles stayed on the landing. Momma stayed downstairs almost as much as our father. She even went with him after supper and on Sunday afternoons. We heard talk about trimming ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

penses and cutting back. The thermostat was turned even lower. Sometimes it seemed if one of us—Angie or Will or I—even looked like we might ask for something, Momma reminded us there were lots of different kinds of trees in the woods, but none of them grew money.

They brought paperwork and bookkeeping upstairs to the kitchen table at night to save on heating costs downstairs. They talked about business. I didn't understand most of what they said, but I did understand that the order for the blinds at the Old Folks' Home had not turned out the way they had hoped it would. And they argued about bills that had to be paid. They yelled at each other, apologized, and yelled some more. Our father became more and more silent, except when he worked on the books with Momma. He brought his silence even to the supper table, and if Momma sat like she was waiting to say grace, he didn't seem to notice and served food onto his plate. At times he left the kitchen and went into the living room and sat in his big chair and stared out a window like he was seeing something none of us could see.

One afternoon early in February there was no basketball practice, and I returned from school with Angie and Will. When we walked into the kitchen, Momma was wearing her heavy coat. Two suitcases stood by the door.

She said, "There's no heat. We're going to Terre Haute for a couple of days." And she named some people she and our father knew who had agreed to take us in until somebody came and refilled our butane tank. Our father came in, picked up the suitcases and walked out without saying a word. Momma pretended to look for something in a cabinet the time he was in the kitchen. Then she made sure we had all our school books, pushed us out the door, and we all went downstairs to the car.

Before we got out of town, she asked, "Is there enough gas in the car to get there?"

Our father said, "Yes, goddamnit, Goldie. I'm not going to leave you stranded to freeze on the road."

"I didn't say you were. I didn't even think it."

"It's not my fault the gauge on the butane tank froze. It looked like we had plenty to last till next week. I would've paid the bill by then, somehow."

She said, "I'm not blaming you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He said, "For Christ's sake, Goldie!"

Every morning our father left the house where we stayed. When I asked Momma where he went, she said, "He's taking care of business." He returned in the evenings, and they kept to themselves and whispered. Their friends seemed not to notice them. Will and I had to sleep on a pallet made of blankets on the floor. We were glad when after nearly a week there, Momma told us we were going home the next day. The apartment was almost warm when we returned, and the first thing Momma did was to turn the thermostat down.

The best thing was the weather came round to something more like normal. It was still cold, but it wasn't that wind-blowing, below zero cold that kept almost every moving thing huddled in the warmest corner it could find. The sun was out most days, with the air bright and clear, and a couple of weekends after we were back, there was a real gathering at the intersection beneath our window. They were all looking toward the top of Sweet's Hill. Even some of the grownups who didn't have anything better to do had come out to watch. Our father had come upstairs to see if we were going out.

Before I got my coat on, Momma said, "Keep in mind we can't afford to fix broken bicycles."

My father said, "Be careful."

On the way to the top of the hill, I felt all the excitement I had felt Christmas day. Everybody was happy to be out again. At the top of the hill we heard the crowd at the bottom yelling at every rider. Halfway down the hill I looked ahead at the intersection and it was like I saw myself already there, making tight, rapid spins, not even needing to count them because the crowd was counting for me. The chill in the wind burned my face, and off the bottom of the hill, leveling out, I saw my father standing in front of his business. He was in shirt sleeves in the cold air, his hands pushed deep into his pockets, as though that was all he needed to be warm. I had a flash of him kneeling on the landing, his hands holding the thin spokes of my wheels, and I did three easy spins and slid straight on toward the breadbox in front of the grocery store to keep from falling. I heard a murmur of disappointment from the crowd, and when I looked back toward the corner, my father had gone back into the building.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Will said, "What happened?"

I said, "Nothing."

Jerry McCloskey said, "He chickened out."

"Fuck you, Fatso!"

McCloskey said, "You want to eat snow, dipshit?" and looked around for somebody to hold his bike.

It might have come to something, probably big, fat McCloskey sitting on me and grinding me through the ice and snow into the pavement, but it stopped because the next rider down the hill lost control of his bike and came crashing into both of us and a half dozen others as well. By the time we got ourselves up, Bradshaw was at the bottom of the hill, and we forgot about everything except watching him. It was almost miraculous. Six, seven, eight, and he would have done the mythical nine and more if a car had not turned toward us at the next corner.

McCloskey and I had completely forgotten what had almost started between us, and nobody else even remembered we were there. We had eyes and thoughts only for Bradshaw. He had challenged us with something much more than just the number of spins we thought were possible. He had shown us a grace and ease that we did not know how to measure and, thus, did not know how to achieve. And he knew he had done something special. He would not ride again that day. He leaned his bike against the wall of the cafe and became the center of the crowd still willing to watch the rest of us. We went again up the hill to ride down and spin through the intersection. Hardly anyone fell. We all knew we were having fun, but we—all of us, even Jerry McCloskey—rode without heart.

The effect of Bradshaw Morgan's ride went beyond that day. It marked the end of a season. We still rode, but we climbed the hill less often and without Bradshaw. Without saying anything about it, we waited for spring. Our parents talked about closing the venetian blind business. March came. One Saturday some men loaded the drills and saws and other tools belonging to our father's business onto a truck, and a deputy sheriff padlocked the doors. Our father spent the whole weekend sitting in his chair in the living room staring at something beyond the window. Monday morning, he left

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before we were ready for school, and Momma told us he had a new job as a salesman in a furniture store in Terre Haute.

The snowfalls stopped, and the ice melted. On Saturdays we rode four miles to the covered bridge over Raccoon Creek, and we planned how later, when the dirt and gravel roads had dried out, we would go first to the bridge, then off the main road to the hogback. That was a ridge that ran for several miles parallel to the creek and formed steep bluffs along the bank that we climbed and sometimes jumped from into the water in the summer. But the water wouldn't be warm enough for that until June, and in April Momma told us our father had taken another job in a town called Sullivan and we were moving when school was out. Nights in the apartment were quieter, and Will and I talked in the dark about the place called Sullivan. We agreed it had to be better than Nadirville, although we didn't know why it had to be. Sometimes when I stayed awake long enough, I heard a soft, soft sound like Momma trying not to cry.

Will and I collected empty boxes from the grocery store and stacked them on the landing and in the hall and some in every room in the apartment. Momma packed our winter clothes and other things we knew we wouldn't need first. She made us help every evening after supper. We filled the empty boxes, stacked them in the hall and the kitchen, and went back to the grocery store for more. By the time our father came home a couple of days before the last day of school to help us finish packing, we were living around, in, and out of boxes. Momma looked tired, and there wasn't much finishing left to do when he got there. Then two days after school was out, two trucks drove up and parked on the street that ran beside the building.

They didn't come together. The first one there was a big stakebody job, with lettering on the cab that said APEX FURNITURE, SULLIVAN, IND. The driver was a little man with gaps between his teeth that showed a lot because he was always grinning. Our father called him Norman, and he called our father "Mr. Rambler," and "Sir."

Norman wanted to start loading right away, and Will and I were eager to help him, even though most of the boxes probably were too heavy for us to carry down the stairs and lift

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

onto the back of the truck. But our father said we had to wait, and he told Norman to come upstairs and get some coffee. Will and I stayed down and climbed over the staked sides of the truck. We were figuring out how to walk all the way around the outside of the truck without getting on the ground when the second truck drove up. It was a van, all closed in with big double doors in the back. ESTES BROTHERS, AUCTIONEERS was painted in big, black letters on the side of the van, and two men sat in the high cab.

The driver got out. He carried a clipboard with papers on it. He shouted, "Hey, kid. Is this where the Ramblers live?"

I said, "Yes," and he started walking toward the front of the building. I called to him and pointed toward the double-door sized opening for the stairs at the rear corner just as my father and Norman came through it onto the sidewalk.

The driver said, "Is one of you Mr. Rambler?"

He didn't say "Mr." in the respectful way Norman did.

My father said, "I am."

The driver looked at the opening, then at the windows on the second floor, and said, "Nobody told me this was a damned upstairs job."

Our father looked at Will and me and said, "Come down from there." When we were on the ground, he said, "I want you two to go play."

I said, "I want to help."

"There'll be plenty for you to help with later. This morning I want you and Will to go play. Find some of your friends and get up a baseball game."

I started toward the stairs.

He said, "Where are you going?"

"To get my bike."

"No. Leave your bikes here."

I said, "What about Angie?"

"Go play!"

He looked like he wanted to say something else, but the two men with the second truck were already starting upstairs and he turned and followed them.

Will said, "Come on." I went, but I didn't hurry.

We walked to the baseball field. A half dozen boys were already there hitting and chasing flies and grounders. Will and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't have gloves, so we went into the outfield and shagged the balls nobody could catch. After awhile, there were enough for us to pick six on a side, with one left over. That one was Will because he was the youngest. I felt bad about him not playing, but he didn't seem to mind much. My side was picked to go in the field first, and by the time we got to come in to bat, Will had gone.

I remember very little about the game except what happened the next time I saw Will. I was playing second base, which meant I faced the road. We had played at least three or four innings when I saw Will running toward the field. He was calling my name at the top of his voice. Everybody turned and watched him for a moment, until somebody got impatient and called us back to the game. The batter hit the ball on the ground toward me. I moved into position to field it, but a runner ran in front of me and I lost sight of the ball. It went past me into the outfield, and everybody started yelling and screaming. Then I realized it was not a base runner who had blocked my view, but Will who had come onto the field. He was standing in front of me, and he was crying.

He yelled, "They're taking everything!"

I said, "What are you talking about?"

"They're taking everything away. Even our bicycles. And that man and Daddy almost got in a fight because that man called our things a pile of junk!"

The others shouted at Will to get off the field. Somebody shouted at me to get Will out of the way and to get back into the game.

Will said, "Come on!" and I ran with him off the field.

Somebody yelled, "Don't come back!"

Once we hit the road, I ran ahead of Will. It was only four long blocks from the baseball field to the apartment. Nothing in Nadirville was more than seven or eight blocks from the apartment. Will called to me to wait for him, but I kept on running. When I got to where I could see the side of the building we lived in, my father, Norman, and the two men who came in the second truck were standing in the street behind the van with the rear, double doors wide open. Momma and Angie stood together on the sidewalk. I ran around the front of the truck and stood on the edge of the sidewalk between Momma and the men in the street.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Momma said, "Come here, Mark."

I ignored her.

"Mark!"

I stepped back beside her. Her eyes were red and she kept wiping at her nose with a wadded-up handkerchief. Angie had big streaks of tears on her cheeks. Will came up. He wasn't crying anymore. He squeezed in between me and Momma. The two men with the truck lifted the bicycles into the back of the van, closed the double doors and pulled a heavy metal bar down across them. The driver handed his clipboard and a pencil to my father.

He said, "Sign there, at the bottom."

My father said, "Do you know when the auction will be?"

The driver said, "Have no idea."

My father signed, and the two men got into the truck. We all stood there and watched as the van turned the corner and disappeared. My father stood in the middle of the street, and I thought he looked almost as old as Grandpa Rambler.

Norman said, "I'll back up to the door, so's we can load the boxes."

Without going upstairs, I knew the men in the van had left the boxes we had packed. I knew that everything else was gone, that it was going somewhere to be auctioned. I knew that what was happening had something to do with my father's business failing, with him going bankrupt, with bills that didn't, couldn't get paid. I knew that was why he and Momma both looked old and tired, too tired even to argue. And I knew that all that was why Momma stood stiff and still when he came up and put his arm around her shoulder like he was trying to shield her from a bitter wind. There wasn't any wind that day.

The truck Norman was backing up to the stairway backfired, and our father said, "We better get to work. It's a long way to go if we're going to get there before dark."

Momma said, "Everybody carries something, but don't try to carry anything too heavy for you."

Norman kept Will in the back of the truck with him to help stack and arrange the boxes the rest of us carried down to them. We worked slowly at first. Momma and our father stopped every now and then and just looked at each other before one of them picked up another box and went down

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the stairs. But emptying one room seemed to make us eager to empty another, and we worked faster and faster.

We were nearly finished when a small crowd of kids, led by Jerry McCloskey, showed up at the corner. Most of them were on bikes, and they rode around, doing figure eights in the intersection. Ruth Ann Parker and Patsy Jukeman came to our side of the corner and Angie went to meet them. They acted like girls and hugged each other and cried.

My father asked me, "Do you want to go tell anyone goodbye?"

I looked toward the corner. Jerry McCloskey was playing chicken with another kid Will's age and rammed his rear wheel.

I said, "No. Can Will and I ride in the back of the truck?"

He had planned for us to ride in the car with Momma and Angie.

Norman said, "I'll ride with 'em."

That was enough. Our father drove the truck. Momma and Angie went ahead in the car so our father would know if they had trouble. When our father started the motor, the kids at the corner moved in front of the cafe. We turned and drove past them, and Jerry McCloskey and the other bigger kids on bikes rode into the middle of the street and followed us. Will sat with Norman on some boxes in the middle, but I found a small space where I could stand against the back stake-panel to watch the blurring motion of the road underneath me smooth out into a fine, black line in the distance. The kids on their bikes spread across the road and pedaled hard. They had found a new game for the moment as they raced and maneuvered for position to lead the pack. The distance between them and the truck gradually increased, but the way my father drove the truck slowly through town kept them from falling very far behind.

I looked over their heads at the intersection and at Sweet's Hill rising beyond it. Both receded, getting smaller and smaller until the hill looked like a narrow strip of ribbon that hung straight down from the sky and stiffened when it met the pavement at the bottom. I thought for a moment that I could even see the figure of a lone rider at the top. I imagined it looked like Bradshaw, as though he were already waiting for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the next winter's snow and ice. The truck went around a sharp curve, and Sweet's Hill vanished. At the edge of town, the riders who had followed us turned off and disappeared behind a fencerow overgrown with blackberry bushes. They were headed for the creek and the hogback. No one had waved or shouted.

Then there was nothing but the noise of dual tires on the blacktop and a broken white line in the center of the road, a line of diminishing dashes that pointed to some place we had lived in once. We were moving to a place called Sullivan. I had no idea where it was, except that by the sun I knew we were headed south. We were moving because my father had gone bankrupt and because my mother sometimes cried in the night. We were moving because two men in a truck took away the things my parents called theirs and the bicycle that was the only thing I had ever called mine. No grownups had come to say good-bye to my parents. We had lived in Nadirville less than two years, and that was not long enough for anyone to believe our coming or going was any great matter. We were moving on a warm, cloudless day with a sky the same color my bike had been on that Christmas morning. It had not been said, but we all knew we would soon move again. I told myself that that, too, would be no great matter.

I climbed carefully over the boxes to the front of the truck. I stood against the cab and let the warm wind strike me full in the face. The narrow stripe of road and the tiny dashes of white down the middle widened and passed blurred beneath the front of the truck. Momma and Angie were well ahead of us so that whenever there was any kind of curve in the road they were out of sight for a moment. The truck seemed to speed up when that happened. There was a small space where I could look through the back window of the cab and see my father. He hunched his shoulders like he was trying to push the truck toward whatever was ahead with his own weight. He drove with both hands on the wheel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TEMMA EHRENFELD

The History of a Little Girls' Game

"Clapsies" was the name my girlfriends and I knew for the rhyming, rhythmic, and often repetitive verses you sing while clapping someone else's hands in a matching pattern. We were fifth-graders then, fifteen years ago. One or two younger boys would sometimes look on with fascination and longing while we played, but self-respecting boys past the age of eight stayed on the other side of the schoolyard blacktop. Only girls did clapsies. We did them every day that year, whenever we could, from the fall to the following spring.

In September, we exchanged our knowledge of clapsies learned elsewhere, from older girls or in camp. Later, the leading clapsie players made up variations on the movements of the standards, and we would practice a variation we liked over and over to make sure that it did not get mixed up and turn into something else. A really good one was impossible to forget forever, though; it was bound to be reinvented. The movements of a good clapsie made so much sense that learning them was more like remembering. Our clapsie movements were logical and deliberate, yet full of energy as, palm on palm, we went faster and faster, slapping harder and harder.

When adults mention this little girls' game, they call it "pattycake"—as in ". . . baker's man, bake me a cake as fast as you can." But pattycake is to clapsies as baby talk is to jive. It is not a game adults think about seriously. I myself hadn't thought of it for more than a decade when one August, entirely by chance, I played clapsies again. My friend Jamie and I were hiking the Appalachian Trail in Maine at the time; the trail was muddy and the undergrowth thick and green. One of the nice things about the Appalachian Trail is the fact that the volunteers who maintain it have built shelters or lean-tos where hikers can sleep. In the logbooks kept there, hikers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write notes to travelers in both directions. Clapsies, I was to think later, are also a kind of public, random, but very American literature.

Jamie, who had gone ahead of me some time before, was asleep on a sunny rock when I met two girls in a lean-to clearing. They looked about nine years old. With them was a woman, seemingly in her fifties. We said hello, the way hikers do. Then, just as it crossed my mind to wonder what circumstances had brought this particular white woman to accompany two little black kids, she told me that they were "Fresh Air Fund girls." She had a "camp" nearby—I figured she meant a summer place—and liked to entertain poor urban kids there for two weeks at a time. The girls stood a little bit away both from Jamie, asleep on the rock, and from us.

While their hostess and I were being friendly, they were doing clapsies. "They didn't know each other at the beginning of the trip," she explained, "but then they started playing pattycake and got along fine. The girls always do that." From the corner of my eye I could see that some of the clapsies they were doing were completely new to me. Clapsies change.

One of the girls was milky-coffee colored, overweight, and still puffing from the hike. Her hands were stiller than the other girl's and slower, like a jazz bass line catching up to a leading flute. She was from Brooklyn. The other girl had an amazingly long-limbed brittle skinniness that, on her small scale, made her seem a model for the stately woman she will someday be. She was very dark and from the Bronx. I asked them to teach me a clapsie they had been doing. It was called "ABC" and it looked harder than it was. The skinny girl, whom I'll call Vanessa, taught it to me in only three tries. By then Vanessa and I had awakened Jamie with our laughing, and she was ready to join me in a clapsie we both knew from the seventies.

"ABC" has a sequence where Vanessa and I clasped hands, like business people shaking hands, except that we also clasped the other set of hands under the first clasp, then the first set of hands under the second clasp. Then we let go and slapped our own thighs and then snapped our fingers. It reminded me of a waterfall, including the splash at the bottom where an imaginary cascade hit our thighs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The song begins with the melody and lyrics of the Jackson Five hit, as far as "123":

ABC
Easy as
123
Ooh, aaah
I wanna piece of pie
pie too sweet
I wanna piece of meat
meat too rough
I wanna ride the bus
bus too full
I wanna ride a bull
bull too black
I wan' my money back
money too green
I wanna jellybean
jellybean not cooked
I wanna read a book
book not read
I wan' some lemonade
lemonade too sour
I wanna climb a tower
tower too high
I wanna say good-bye
Good-bye. . . .

[This is when you tickle the other person's stomach and usually everybody laughs.]

Too soon it was time to leave the girls and their hostess so we could hike up the hill before sundown. I wondered then if white girls or girls whose own parents could afford to send them to Maine knew the clapsies these two girls knew. Did the girls in my hometown, for instance, know "ABC"? I decided to find out.

My hometown, Teaneck, New Jersey, is a middle class community of some 40,000 people who live only seven miles from the "GW Bridge" to New York. There is a book about Teaneck, *Triumph in a White Suburb*, that describes how it came to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be the first town to integrate voluntarily, in 1965. Teaneck is a good place to collect clapsies, since (as we shall see) the game has been a way of sharing between blacks and whites from its beginnings.

On an early October morning I arrived at Lowell School carrying a large cassette recorder, just in time for the recess after lunch. "I want to see if anyone is still doing the clapsies I did as a kid," I told one of the lunch aides, a middle-aged black woman. "They're still doing some of the clapsies I did!" she exclaimed, as if flattered by a compliment they paid her.

Out in the schoolyard, the girls at Lowell put on a show for me, and each other. They sang together in a big circle around whatever pair was demonstrating a clapsie. A few authoritative girls decided which pair would go next, and one girl made sure everybody knew which clapsies I had and hadn't taped, so the next pair could be sure to demonstrate a new one. All I had to do was agree to the choice and push my cassette recorder on and off.

It turned out that Teaneck girls do know "ABC," the very funky clapsie the Fresh Air Fund girls taught me. Two black fourth-graders evidently had taught it to the other girls at Lowell. And the girls at Whittier School, on the other side of town, knew it, too.

Advanced clapsie players develop varieties done in foursomes and in big circles instead of one-on-one. These were the clapsies the girls at Whittier demonstrated for me. Sometimes two pairs interweaved the original hand movements, and sometimes a player in a foursome might clap hands with more than one other girl in a more complicated interweaving. Only a few girls could do this smoothly. Anxious to find a foursome that could perform one particularly difficult clapsie for me successfully, two of the bossier girls asked another girl not to play. She agreed immediately, looking much less hurt than I would have expected. She didn't look hurt for long, either. After the clapsie had been done, she was invited into the next round by the same pair that had ejected her. Cooperation is basic to clapsies.

The players might also stand in a big circle singing, each with her right palm resting on top of the palm of her neighbor; as they sang, each in turn flipped her free right arm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over to slap the back of the hand resting on hers. When the song ended, the last person who was slapped left the circle. The players repeated the song until only two were left.

I don't remember doing circle claps like this one as a child, but Jamie, who grew up in one of the wealthier parts of Chicago, does. She described to me a clapsie that I later found recorded by Bess Hawes, a researcher in the field of black folk culture: "I have seen Los Angeles children playing this circle clap, though to different rhymes . . . clapping their neighbors' hands with right hand clapping up and left hand down; clapping their own hands together; clapping their neighbors' hands *left* hand up and *right* hand down; clapping their own hands, etc. Children can do this with enormous speed as early as the age of six. Interestingly, A.M. Jones describes just such clapping play in a child's game from West Africa." (In Chicago, Jamie tells me, she did this pattern matched with a song that began "A sailor went to sea, sea, sea.")

The connection between West Africa, on the one hand, and Chicago and Teaneck, on the other, can be traced. In fact, the more I learned about clapsies, the more I learned about what it means to live in a racially mixed culture, to be female, and, above all, to be a child.

The lyrics and clapping of clapsies have two near historical sources, white and black. Children's games are said to be piecemeal relics of abandoned bits of adult culture. Clapsies are no exception to the rule. Like other traditional children's games, they echo adult customs of previous centuries. Yet it is one of the mysteries of children's spontaneous games that they mysteriously persist over time and over large areas quite independently of adults.

Girls across the continent learn clapsies, counting out rhymes ("eeny, meeny, miney, moe"), and jump rope and ball-bouncing songs at certain ages—and television, radio, books, teachers, and parents usually have nothing to do with it. In the United States the game has been a kind of sponge, absorbing trickles of culture from regions as far away as the British Isles and Africa, and from times as remote as the eighteenth century. In this respect, clapsies resemble the rest

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of American culture, so that in almost every American girl, there's something that likes a clapsie. You could say that clapsies are a whole library of oral and manual girllore.

The lyrics date to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British and American girls' singing games, which were much more varied and numerous than those of today. "Ring around a rosey," originally called "Ring a Ring of Roses," is perhaps the simplest and most familiar. (There used to be an idea, later proved false, that this ring game had been inspired by the plague.) Now confined to pre-schoolers, "Ring around a rosy" is a good example of how traditional girls' games came to be played by ever-younger children. Victorian girls as old as fourteen played such games, singing of marriage, death, and burial, or of women's chores (as in the contemporary pre-schoolers' game "Mulberry bush": "This is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes . . .") As they sang, they did pantomimes, clapped, skipped, or danced in rings or lines like those of American and English country dances. The games themselves were played in previous centuries by adults. The clapping was the straightforward sort where you clap only your own hands.

The best record of these games is Lady Alice Bertha Gomme's 1894 two-volume collection of *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland.* Gleaned from her adult correspondents' memories of both rural and urban Victorian childhoods, Lady Alice's games probably date from the middle of that century, and no doubt her accounts were tidied up considerably by memory and the demands of respectability. Nearly all of these games have quietly disappeared, as have those described by her American counterpart, the anthropologist and folklorist William Wells Newell. However, the branches of the broad family tree of clapsies can easily be traced through a few modern examples that preserve ancestral words or clapping patterns.

One such is "Miss Mary Mack," about a girl dressed in black, with silver buttons down her back, who asked her mother for fifteen cents to see an elephant "jump over the fence." Gomme records a game called "Alligoshee," in which mid-nineteenth-century girls of Middleton, Hersham, Surrey, and Shepscombe sang of various people dressed in black with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silver buttons down their backs. Another part of "Miss Mary Mack" appears in folklorist Brian Sutton-Smith's history of children's games in New Zealand. It records that New Zealand children are said to have sung the following verse as early as 1901: "Pounds, shillings, and pence, the monkey jumped the fence / He went so high, he reached the sky / Pounds, shillings, and pence." As for the elephant, the earliest evidence of it that I uncovered appears in a clapsie one black woman remembers from Georgia after the turn of the century. Hers is also the first evidence I found of similar words tied to clapping.

Today, the lyrics of clapsies are approximately half-British and half-American, with ancestors that can be traced throughout the British Empire and the United States. There are relatives in Continental Europe, as well. It follows from this history that if the roots of clapsie lyrics are farflung, the lyrics themselves are quite as far from fixed. "ABC" is a modern contribution to a song that was conceived long ago: it is an example of folklore-in-the-making.

The clapping patterns and music of contemporary hand-clapping have always been black in style, with African roots. Girls play clapsies in strictly white towns, as well as in integrated towns like Teaneck—yet blacks do have a special cultural claim as inventors.

Steven Spielberg gave us several extended soft-focus renderings of hand-clapping near the beginning of his movie *The Color Purple*, based on the Alice Walker novel set in 1909 among poor black women in the rural South. The movie obscured the complexity and variety of clapsies; Celie and Nellie's pattycake was much too simple for girls their age. Black girls actually know many more, and more complicated, singing games than other American girls do. In the 1920s, when the traditional games began to die out among the white majority, black girls continued to adapt the old games to a specifically black tradition of clapping and communal showing-off sessions.

The Anglo-American games and lyrics had married Afro-American rhythms some three centuries earlier. When the traditional games first crossed the ocean, slaves—both children and adults—encountered them on plantations. Soon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they had been mixed into the elaborate social clapping play that then bloomed among the American inheritors of African polyrhythmic drumming.

Applause, clapping to folk music, or clapping to chants at political demonstrations are related in spirit to this black clapping tradition; all distill the powerful effect of actions performed in unison or in a kind of rhythmic harmony. Well into the 1900s, Southern blacks of all ages, male and female, still knew a variety of off-beat, total-body, community-making yet improvisational slapping games that are now seen mostly in rudimentary forms and mostly among kids. "Gimme five" springs from this tradition. So does the complicated solo body-slapping routine called "Hambone," or handjiving, which is what little black boys are doing when they drum on tables and slap their own thighs and stomachs.

Once accompanied by a song of the same name, "Hambone" was a man's act. As Bess Hawes wrote in 1972, most young black men still know one or another version of the routine. It has had a mini-revival since then after appearing on two recent McDonald's commercials.

"Hand Warmin', Hand Clappin' " inspired so many calls to the company asking for directions on how to do the routine that McDonald's printed up an advisory flyer. "Hand Warmin's Back" appeared in fall 1986 complete with handjiving performances by a baby, white professional types of both sexes, an elderly white couple, a black couple, and a young black man who spins in his wheelchair before slapping the hand of his white friend. They all clap their hands, slap their stomachs and thighs, slap other people's hands, or otherwise raise a heartwarming ruckus while eating their french fries.

At least some of the original versions of games like "Hambone" would have been entirely lost to memory and recorded history had they not been recalled by Bessie Jones of St. Simon's Island, Georgia, and compiled by Bess Hawes in *Step It Down*. As an octogenarian in the 1970s Jones evidently was able to demonstrate a book's worth of the singing games (words, music, and clapping) from her youth in the rural black community of Dawson, Georgia. It was Bessie Jones who described the clapsie with Miss Mary Mack's elephant. The name she gave was "Green Sally Up."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bessie and her friends learned "Green Sally Up" from their parents. Indeed, this was the first step in a long development process that culminated in adult solo clapping performances. Its clapping pattern is the basic pattycake: clap right hands; then your own hands together once; clap left hands; then your own hands together once; and right hands again:

Green Sally up
Green Sally down
Green Sally bake her possum brown
asked my mama for 15 cents
to see that elephant jump the fence
he jumped so high
he touched the sky
he never got back
until the Fourth of July
you see that house, on that hill
that's where me and my baby live.
oh the rabbit in the hash come a-stepping in the dash
with his long-tailed coat and his beaver on.

It makes sense that Bessie Jones's instructional clapsie contained part of both the words and clapping pattern of "Miss Mary Mack," the first, the simplest, and, probably, the most widely known clapsie I did as a child. "Miss Mary Mack" merely varies the pattycake with a cross on the chest. As with all clapsies, each of the movements is timed to a syllable or beat:

Miss Mary [cross hands on chest; slap thighs; and clap your own hands together once]
Mack, Mack, Mack [the pattycake: clap right hands; then your own hands together once; clap left hands; then your own hands together once; and right hands again]
all dressed in [repeat hand sequence from beginning]
black, black, black
with silver
buttons, buttons, buttons [you have to say "buttons" fast as if the word were one syllable]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all down her
back, back, back.
She asked her
mother, mother, mother [fast]
for 15
cents, cents, cents
to see the
elephant, elephant, elephant [very fast]
jump over the ["over" is one beat]
fence, fence, fence.
It jumped so
high, high, high
it reached the
sky, sky, sky
and it never came ["and it" is one beat, and so is "never"]
back, back, back
'til the Fourth
of July, July, July ["of July" is one beat, and so are the next two "Julys"]

But the contributions made by previous generations to the clapsies of the present are not always this easy to recognize, for the games played by twentieth-century kids sound up-to-date despite deep roots. The topics and themes of clapsie lyrics are seldom anachronistic when they are clear: pubescent sex, for instance, has replaced marriage as a major topic. A new attitude towards death, too, has replaced the nineteenth-century one. Once accepted as a universal fate, death is now universally resistible in clapsies—with medical help, of course.

It would indeed be a throwback for children in the 1980s to sing the lyrics of, say, the traditional singing game called "Waterflower," with its opening announcement of mortality. Nonetheless, traces of these lyrics can be detected in several current clapsies, and they are worth describing in full. Reported in a 1944 collection of *Play Songs of the Deep South* (and probably dating back some years earlier), "Waterflower" seems to be about many things simultaneously: the dependency of women on men; the threat of death inherent in all rites of passage, which represent progress toward a certain end;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lovesickness; and love as an escape from death. The story is simply that a girl recovers from deadly lovesickness by marrying the boy. In the Deep South both boys and girls played "Waterflower." First they skipped around one girl who stood in the center as they sang:

Waterflower, waterflower
Growing up so tall
All the young ladies must surely, surely die

Then they stood still and pointed at her, singing,

All except Miss 'Lindy Watkins
[actually, the center girl's real full name would be used]
She is everywhere
The white folks say, the white folks say,
Turn your back and tell your beau's name

Miss 'Lindy Watkins turned her back and hung her head, picking it up only to point to a boy, her "Johnny." Another boy, the "Doctor," then entered the ring and gravely examined 'Lindy's tongue and pulse. Her encirclers stood and clapped their hands on the first and third beats as they sang,

Doctor, Doctor, can you tell
What will make poor 'Lindy well?
She is sick and 'bout to die
That will make poor Johnny [real boy's name] cry!
Marry, marry, marry quick
'Lindy you are just lovesick . . .

They continued clapping as the Doctor fetched Johnny and returned to his place in the circle, Johnny courted 'Lindy, and 'Lindy and Johnny joined hands and danced.

Such funereal Victorian singing games have disappeared in our age, when it is no longer common for a child to see a sibling die or touch a dead body. But children's verses still frequently touch on sickness and mortality; and emergency house visits are a running theme of clapsies. "Waterflower"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may be a direct historical link from an Anglo-American game to the clapsie "Uno dos cietas." There, excesses with a boyfriend lead to a potentially deadly bellyache (pregnancy?) that is conquered by demonstrating competence with numbers (competence to be an adult, on one's own?). However, in "Uno dos cietas," unlike "Waterflower," the boy is not the cure; in fact, he is not even present for the cure:

Uno dos cietas
East west
I met my boyfriend at the candy store
He brought me ice cream
He brought me cake
He brought me home with a bellyache
Mama, Mama I feel sick
call the doctor
quick, quick, quick
Doctor, doctor
will I die?
Count to five
and you'll be alive
1,2,3,4,5
I'm alive!

The modern elements in clapsies are usually self-evident. Clapsies today are female chauvinist, witty, cynical, rude, and wise by turns. "S.O.S.," a current favorite at Lowell, is an example of typical boy baiting, explaining that "Boys go to Jupiter, to get more stupider / Girls go to Mars, to get more candy bars." If lyrics cannot be dated conclusively by the attitudes expressed, modern references, such as this indirect one to Mars candy bars, will give it away. A number of clapsies, like "ABC," include lyrics from songs or commercials. One clapsie launches a story by listing soft drinks. Another, "Big Mac Filet of Fish," turns a commercial jingle on its head, concluding: "You deserve a break today / so get up and throw your food away / at McDonald's / the dish ran away with the spoon." McDonald's picked up the teasing tone in its own jingle for the "Hand Warmin' " commercials, which proclaim

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that "It doesn't mean a lot if you don't get it *hot*!" The "it" refers to solo handjive, but as I heard this I kept thinking that the jingle was about a cold hamburger.

"Rocking Robin" takes off from a 1950s American hit. The obscenities were added by the kids:

swing swing, swing
to the arithmetic, Hey, hey!
rocking in the treetop
all day long
huffin' and a'puffin'
and a'singing my song
all the little birdies
on Jaybird street
love to hear the robin go
tweet, tweet, tweet

(chorus, with the same melody as the original)
rocking robin
tweet, tweet, elite
rocking robin
tweet, tweet, elite

Mama's in the kitchen cooking rice
Papa's in the alley (or Papa's in the poolroom)
shooting dice
Mama's in jail sitting on the pail
Papa's downstairs selling fruit cocktail
(chorus)

Batman stepped on Robin's toe
Robin said "Don't do it no more!"
Batman said "I'm the FBI"
Robin said "That's a doggone lie."
(chorus)

Went downtown to get a stick of butter
then fell down sitting in the gutter
went downtown to get a piece of glass

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoved it up his ass and
ooh, ah, I never saw a mother-fucker
run so fast
all the little birdies
had a real good time tonight
there goes King Kong
playing ping pong with his rubber ding dong

Several of the clapsies are surprisingly worldly. One such is "The Spades Go," which has nothing in common but the first three words with the clapsie I knew by that name. I have yet to find a child who knows my version. Mine expressed a sentimental view of love; the new one decidedly does not, although (as you will see) it answers the lovelorn question of mine: "What is the me-ee-ee-ening of all this sah-ah-ah-awr-row over the hills of love?" But you'll have to accept "just because I kiss you, doesn't mean I love you" as an answer. In my version,

The spades go
tulips together
twilight forever
bring back my love to me
my heart goes
thump badee ump bump
thump badee ump bump
over the thought of thee
What is the
me-ee-ee-ening . . .

In the new version,

The spades go
down, down baby
down by the rollercoaster
sweet sweet baby
never gonna let you go
just because I kiss you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doesn't mean I love you
caught you with your boyfriend
late last night
hugging and a'kissing
and a'holding you tight
How do we know that?
peeking through the keyhole
naughty naughty
didn't wash the dishes
lazy lazy
jumped out the window
crazy crazy
ooh la la walla walla walla
ooh la la walla walla walla
I love you

The danger of applying literary analysis to clapsies is that one may read sense into what children happily accept as nonsensical. I actually know of three clapsies that begin, "the spades go." Could the phrase once have referred to the slang meaning of "spades," blacks? If so, the kids are now completely unconscious of it. Often, too, they do not understand the curse words or sexual references of clapsies—which is not to say that they therefore do not know that they are being rude. Some do; some don't. This depends on age: Remember that clapsies are child's play.

"Green Sally Up" and clapsies in general are a characteristically childish instance of the black art of clapping. First, the rhythms of clapsies are very simple. Second, little girls' consciousness of a communal purpose is relatively vague. Clapping in clapsies is more like drumming than applause since it is nearly free of any purpose other than making sound (much as the lyrics often are). Unlike adult clapping, it is not primarily intended to convey approval of a performer or attract attention or create a sense of community. This is one reason no one doubts that clapsies are now the product and possession of the young, although children imitate the adult uses of clapping, as well.

Another reason is that the lyrics of clapsies are also not primarily intended to communicate messages. Children have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their own ways of understanding language. For one thing, they are more prone than adults to continue associating words heard together by chance. When they are asked to free-associate in psychological tests with a given word, say "green," they may well respond, "red," or "blue," in adult fashion, but they also tend to come up with such words as "grass," "light," or, if the child happens to own a green truck, "truck." Children delight in word association much as some grown-up poets do: They aren't the least bit disconcerted by near-nonsensical or nonsensical results.

The appeal of clapsie lyrics may therefore lie more in the way the words are organized than in their meaning. It is the nature of clapsies, and jump-rope or ball-bouncing songs, to include (1) fixed lists ("ABC," "123"); (2) couplets; (3) series of phrases with similar grammatical structures; (4) potentially endless lists of ideas or objects; and (5) repetitions of a word or words at the beginning of linked phrases, at the end of phrases, or at the beginnings *and* ends of phrases, which often lead to a climax. You'll find examples of all of these kinds of rhetoric in "ABC," and you can find 1, 4, and 5 in the sentence above this one.

Such verbal patterning is traditional in folklore, in working songs like "John Henry" as well as in children's verses. Clapsie rhetoric has more in common with adult rhetoric than one would think at first hearing. If clapsie lyrics are distinguished mainly by their lack of overt sense, it is also true that the lyrics of some adult music—from the polyphony of the sixteenth century to twentieth-century rock—conspicuously fail to communicate, either by being inaudible, patently rhetorical, repetitive, or simply stupid. Of course, that adults sometimes do what children do does not make children any less childish.

To note the childishness of clapsies is not to say that they do not help prepare girls of various ages for adulthood, or that a boys' game would do the job better. I add this because when it comes to playing, childishness and girlishness are often confused.

Psychological and historical research comparing the games of the sexes do suggest that there is a "feminine" way of playing. Boys were traditionally the active, aggressive sex. In the days when they were playing the early, violent, and now ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tinct versions of modern sports like rugby, girls' games were relatively static and inactive. They were charming because they were orderly and mannered, like "Waterflower"; indeed, they could be viewed by adults as symbolic demonstrations that conflict can be controlled, and it was as such that they were deemed psychologically satisfying to girls. Nowadays, boys are still more likely to play outdoor team sports, and boys play them at younger ages. Girls tend to play in small spaces or indoors, and to play one-on-one. Their games emphasize the skill and verbal cleverness of individuals, not speed or strategy or team spirit.

There is a long-standing discussion among feminists about how to equip our daughters for the hazards and opportunities of adulthood. Some argue that habits carried over from traditional girls' games put women at a disadvantage in the later games of life—especially those of large organizations. Girls' games, it is charged, are too orderly, too focused on skill rather than ingenuity or energy, and above all too individualistic. In *Games Mother Never Taught You* (New York: Rawson Associates, 1977), Betty Lehan Harragan states the charge in especially extreme terms, but her points are not unrepresentative of the debate. She writes, "For traditional girls' games [such as jacks and jump rope] there are no umpires or officials, no opposing teams of critical judges, no advantages to be gained from collaboration). . . . Girls' games are children's games which are outgrown early in childhood and never resumed because they have no intrinsic educational value; they teach nothing. . . . The objective of girls' games is never to beat anybody or perform under competitive stress, but merely to improve an agility in a vacuum."

How strange to confuse the absence of teams and concerned adults, or formal competition and its trappings, with a . . . "vacuum." Has she forgotten the girls themselves? The word would suggest that traditional girls' games might as well be played alone. This is certainly not true of clapsies, which by nature can't be played alone. Girls who play jacks and jump rope and clapsies together become a community. While the making of a community is not the self-evident purpose of clapsies, as with adult clapping at demonstrations, the community exists. Its purpose is to support (or criticize) the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

achievement of individuals within conspicuously predetermined and therefore rather demanding parameters. The clapsie set-up represents some kinds of real-life competition much more closely than does a confrontation of teams.

Clapsies do fit the stereotype of girls' games. They are verbal; cooperative, without the complex organization of teams or opposing "sides"; free of strategy, elaborate rules, arguments about rules, and numerical outcomes. In short they may be girlish, but this does not mean that they are easy or uncompetitive. The game requires individuals to perfect their coordination, concentration, and ability to perform in a partnership, usually before an audience. The competition is implicit. Clapsie-style competition is like competition in the arts.

In any event, girls are changing their games of their own free will, so arguments based on projections from the girlhoods of today's women seem less and less relevant. One of the general rules of this century has been the tendency for girls to abandon their own games in favor of pastimes once peculiar to boys. In such circumstances, it is hard to see why girls need encouragement to play as boys do. The idea is a mere prejudice that ignores childish and girlish virtues.

Meanwhile clapsies, like many traditional girls' games before them, may eventually disappear among white girls. "There's no question that the game is fading," Brian Sutton-Smith told me from his office in Philadelphia, where he is Professor of Human Development and Folklore at the University of Pennsylvania. In an essay called "Sixty Years of Historical Change in the Game Preferences of American Children," as well as in other writings on the subject, Dr. Sutton-Smith explains that formal singing games began to fade among whites during the 1920s. After World War II, these games all but disappeared as girls turned to jump rope and ball-bouncing instead. The girls became increasingly active, perhaps simply because sneakers, loose clothing, and adult encouragement permitted them to be. Clapsies probably picked up after the War, too, Dr. Sutton-Smith suggested to me. Yet in his recent study of games played in the Philadelphia area clapsies were hardly mentioned in reports of play among white girls. Blacks are another story, of course.

My own observations bear out the suspicion that clapsies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are now declining among whites. A boys' game is on the road to extinction when, at some point in its evolution, it begins to be played mainly, and then only, by girls. By contrast, a girls' game comes to be played by younger and younger girls before dying out, the fate of the original "Ring a Ring of Roses." In Teaneck, clapsies are no longer, as they were in the seventies, most popular in the fifth grade; they've slipped down to the first few months of the fourth. That's when the new fourth-graders teach each other the clapsies they learned over the summer, while the fifth-graders move on to singing Madonna songs in chorus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOYCE CAROL OATES

Jekyll/Hyde

Like such mythopoetic figures as Frankenstein, Dracula, and, even, Alice ("in Wonderland"), Dr.-Jekyll-and-Mr.-Hyde has become, in the century following the publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novella, what might be called an autonomous creation. That is, people who have never read the novella—people who do not in fact "read" at all—know by way of popular culture who Jekyll-Hyde is. (Though they are apt to speak of him, not altogether accurately, as two disparate beings: *Dr.* Jekyll, *Mr.* Hyde.) A character out of prose fiction, Jekyll-Hyde seems nonetheless autogenetic in the way that vampires and werewolves and (more benignly) fairies seem autogenetic: surely he has always existed in the collective imagination, or, like Jack the Ripper, in actual history? (As "Dracula" is both the specific creation of the novelist Bram Stoker and a nightmare figure out of middle European history.) It is ironic that, in being so effaced, Robert Louis Stevenson has become immortalized by way of his private fantasy—which came to him, by his own testimony, unbidden, in a dream.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) will strike contemporary readers as a characteristically Victorian moral parable, not nearly so sensational (nor so piously lurid) as Stoker's *Dracula*; in the tradition, perhaps, of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which a horrific tale is conscientiously subordinated to the author's didactic intention. Though melodramatic in conception it is not melodramatic in execution since virtually all its scenes are narrated and summarized after the fact. There is no ironic ambiguity, no Wildean subtlety, in the doomed Dr. Jekyll's confession: he presents himself to the reader as a congenital "double dealer" who has nonetheless "an almost morbid sense of shame" and who, in typically Victorian middle-class fashion, must act to dissociate "himself" (i.e., his reputation as a highly regarded physician) from his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

baser instincts. He can no longer bear to suppress them and it is impossible to eradicate them. His discovery that "Man is not truly one, but two" is seen to be a scientific fact, not a cause for despair. (And, in time, it may be revealed that man is "a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens"—which is to say that the ego contains multitudes: multiple personalities inhabit us all. It cannot be incidental that Robert Louis Stevenson was himself a man enamoured of consciously playing roles and assuming personae: his friend Arthur Symons said of him that he was "never really himself except when he was in some fantastic disguise.")

Thus Dr. Jekyll's uncivilized self, to which he gives the symbolic name Hyde, is at once the consequence of a scientific experiment (as the creation of Frankenstein's monster was a scientific experiment) and a shameless indulgence of appetites that cannot be assimilated into the propriety of everyday Victorian life. There is a sense in which Hyde, for all his monstrosity, is but an addiction like alcohol, nicotine, drugs: "The moment I choose," Dr. Jekyll says, "I can be rid of him." Hyde must be hidden not simply because he is wicked but because Dr. Jekyll is a willfully good man—an example to others, like the much-admired lawyer Mr. Utterson who is "lean, long, dusty, dreary and yet somehow [improbably?] lovable." Had the Victorian ideal been less hypocritically ideal or had Dr. Jekyll been content with a less perfect public reputation his tragedy would not have occurred. (As Wilde's Basil Hallward says in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "We in our madness have separated the two [body and soul] and have invented a realism that is vulgar, and an ideality that is void." The key term here is surely "madness.")

Dr. Jekyll's initial experience, however, approaches ecstasy as if he were, indeed, discovering the Kingdom of God that lies within. The magic drug causes nausea and a grinding in the bones and a "horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death." Then:

> I came to myself as if out of a great sickness. There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> current of disordered sensual images running like a mill race in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. I knew myself, at the first breath of this new life, to be more wicked, tenfold more wicked, sold a slave to my original evil; and the thought, in that moment, braced and delighted in me like wine.

Unlike Frankenstein's monster, who is nearly twice the size of an average man, Jekyll's monster is dwarfed: "less robust and less developed" than the good self since Jekyll's rigorously suppressed life has been the consequence of unrelenting "effort, virtue and control." (Stevenson's anatomy of the human psyche is as grim as Freud's—virtually all a "good" man's waking energies are required in beating back and denying the "badness" in him!) That Hyde's frenzied pleasures are even in part specifically sexual is never confirmed, given the Victorian cast of the narrative itself, but, to extrapolate from an incident recounted by an eyewitness, one is led to suspect they are: Hyde is observed running down a ten-year-old girl in the street and calmly trampling over her body. Much is made subsequently of the girl's "screaming"; and of the fact that money is paid to her family as recompense for her violation.

Viewed from without Hyde is detestable in the abstract: "I never saw a man I so disliked," the lawyer Enfield says, "and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere. . . ." Another witness testifies to his mysteriously intangible deformity "without any nameable malformation." But when Jekyll looks in the mirror he is conscious of no repugnance, "rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human." When Jekyll returns to himself after having been Hyde he is plunged into wonder rather than remorse at his "vicarious depravity." The creature summoned out of his soul and sent forth to do his pleasure is a being "inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone." Yet Hyde is safely *other*—"It was Hyde, after all, and Hyde alone, that was guilty."

Oscar Wilde's equally didactic but far more suggestive and poetic *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) makes the disturbing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

point that Dorian Gray, the *unblemished* paragon of evil, "is the type of which the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found." (Just as Wilde's Lord Henry defends insincerity "as a method by which we can multiply our personalities.") By contrast Jekyll's Hyde is a very nearly Bosch-like creature, proclaiming his wickedness to the naked eye as if, in Utterson's words, he is a "troglodyte . . . the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent." One is reminded of nineteenth-century theories of criminology advanced by C. S. Lombroso and Henry Maudsley, among others, who argued that outward physical defects and deformities are the visible signs of inward and invisible faults: the criminal is a type that can be easily identified by experts. Dr. Jekyll is the more reprehensible in his infatuation with Hyde in that, as a well-trained physician, he should have recognized at once the telltale symptoms of mental and moral degeneracy in his alter ego's very face.

By degrees, like any addict, Jekyll surrenders his autonomy. His ego ceases being "I" and splits into two distinct and eventually warring selves, which share memory as they share a common body. Only after Hyde commits murder does Jekyll make the effort to regain control; but by this time, of course, it is too late. What had been "Jekyll"—that precarious cuticle of a self, that field of tensions in perpetual opposition to desire—has irrevocably split. It is significant that the narrator of Jekyll's confession speaks of both Jekyll and Hyde as if from the outside. And with a passionate eloquence otherwise absent from Stevenson's prose:

> The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll. And certainly the hate that now divided them was equal on each side. With Jekyll, it was a thing of vital instinct. He had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death: and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, should usurp the offices of life. And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life.

"Think of it," Jekyll had gloated at the start, "—I did not even exist!" And the purely metaphorical becomes literally true.

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, though stimulated by a dream, is not without its literary antecedents: among them Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson" (1839), in which, paradoxically, the "evil" self is the narrator and the "good" self, or conscience, the double; and Charles Dickens' uncompleted *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), in which the Choirmaster Jack Jasper, an opium addict, oscillates between "good" and "evil" impulses in his personality with an anguish so convincingly calibrated as to suggest that, had Dickens lived to complete the novel, it would have been one of his masterpieces—and would have made *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* redundant. Cautionary tales of malevolent, often diabolical doubles abound in folklore and oral tradition, and in Plato's *Symposium* it was whimsically suggested that each human being has a double to whom he was once *physically* attached—a bond of Eros that constituted in fact a third, and higher, sex in which male and female were conjoined.

The visionary starkness of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* anticipates that of Freud in such late melancholy meditations as *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929–30): there is a split in man's psyche between ego and instinct, between civilization and "nature," and the split can never be healed. Freud saw ethics as a reluctant concession of the individual to the group, veneer of a sort overlaid upon an unregenerate primordial self. The various stratagems of culture—including, not incidentally, the "sublimation" of raw aggression by way of art and science—are ultimately powerless to contain the discontent, which must erupt at certain periodic times, on a collective scale, as war. Stevenson's quintessentially Victorian parable is unique in that the protagonist initiates his tragedy of doubleness out of a fully lucid sensibility—one might say a scientific sensibility. Dr. Jekyll knows what he is doing, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

why he is doing it, though he cannot, of course, know how it will turn out. What is unquestioned throughout the narrative, by either Jekyll or his circle of friends, is mankind's fallen nature: sin is *original*, and *irremediable*. For Hyde, though hidden, will not remain so. And when Jekyll finally destroys him he must destroy Jekyll too.

Robert Louis Stevenson died suddenly, in 1894, aged forty-four, not of tuberculosis as he'd long feared but of a cerebral hemorrhage. According to his wife's testimony he had just come up from the basement of their house when, stricken with pain, he cried out to her: "What's the matter with me, what is this strangeness, *has my face changed*?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ANDREW HUDGINS

The Hereafter

Some people as they die grow fierce, afraid.
They see a bright light, offer frantic prayers
and try to climb them, like Jacob's ladder, up
to heaven. Others, never wavering,
inhabit heaven years before they die,
so certain of their grace they can describe,
down to the gingerbread around the eaves,
the cottage god has saved for them. For hours
they'll talk of how the willow will not weep,
the flowering judas not betray. They'll talk
of how they'll finally learn to play the flute
and speak good French.

Still others know they'll rot
and their flesh turn to earth, which will become
live-oaks, spreading their leaves in August light.
The green cathedral glow that shines through them
will light grandchildren playing hide-and-seek
inside the grove. My next-door neighbor says
he's glad the buzzards will at last give wings
to those of us who've envied swifts as they
swoop, twist, and race through tight mosquito runs.

And some—my brother's one—anticipate
the grave as if it were a chair pulled up
before a fire on winter nights. His ghost,
he thinks, will slouch into the velvet cushion,
a bourbon and branchwater in its hand.
I've even met a man who says the soul
will come back in another skin—the way
a renter moves from house to house. Myself,
I'd like to come back as my father's hound.
Or something fast: a deer, a rust-red fox.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For so long I have thought of us as nails
God drives into the oak floor of this world,
it's hard to comprehend the hammer turned
to claw me out. I'm joking mostly. I love
the possibilities—not one or two
but all of them. So if I had to choose,
pick only one and let the others go,
my death would be less strange, less rich, less like
a dizzying swig of fine rotgut. I roll
the busthead, slow, across my tongue and taste
the copper coils, the mockingbird that died
from fumes and plunged, wings spread, into the mash.
And underneath it all, just barely there,
I find the scorched-nut hint of corn that grew
in fields I walked, flourished beneath a sun
that warmed my skin, swayed in a changing wind
that tousled, stung, caressed, and toppled me.

Green Inside the Door: A Memory

The summer we lived halfway underground
we watched legs scissor past, until the damp
grass grew to fill our window—wavering,
translucent with green light. But staring out
we stared through lilting underwater light
into the wettest spring I've ever seen.
Rain rode the saturated ground and ran
into the Warrior River, which we watched
swell, bobbing with chocolate froth—disgusting
until it flowed into the distant mist
and softened into beauty once again.

All that water wouldn't stay outside
our rented rooms. The rivers and the rain
pushed in, oozed through the walls, and soon the rug

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sucked at our feet, like mud. We pulled it up
and found another world had flourished there,
in darkness, underneath our feet. It spread,
invaded, claimed. We tracked the spoors from room
to room. We walked to town
in dusty-green, elf-colored shoes. The prints
smudged lighter, feathery, with every step
until they went invisible. As you
walked out of sight I watched and tried to mark
exactly when the green
faded past seeing, as if your feet had lifted
off into flight.

Forgive me if I tease
and make the hurt seem beautiful or neat.
But even then we tried to laugh. We said
our rooms were greener than the trees that knocked
against the walls as if they wanted in.
Exquisite variants of green ran riot,
dappling the off-white walls
with almost turquoise shades of green. On top
of them, starbursts of black-
green blossomed, blackened utter black, and stank,
as if mortality sneaked in at night
and pressed black lipstick kisses on the paint.
We scrubbed, waited a night, and they returned.
Green filled our rooms and then our dreams. In bed,
our bodies cupped, we dreamed it covered us
with drifts of green that ripened into black.

At last, afraid, yelling, we stripped the whole
place empty, tossed our things onto the lawn.
The neighbors peeked from windows, careful not
to let us see too much of them: a hand
around the drapes, a blur
as someone's worried face jerked out of sight.
Our yelling scared them. Hell, it scared us too.
Our red hands smoldered underneath harsh soap.
We fought and scrubbed possessions till they broke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against the bristles. We
left wet things drying in the sun, returned
to almost barren rooms that smelled of bleach
and slept, still holding hands—raw burning hands.
With all that heat you'd think the flesh would fuse
like metal. Some books, some shoes, some love survived.
And so did we, my love, but separately.

Bewilderments of the Eye

> The bewilderments of the eye are of two kinds and arise from two causes: either from coming out of the light or from going into the light.
> —Plato

My neighbor's bug light sizzles beyond the hedge
until I want to scream. A loud wild shriek
would serve the fellow right for all the death
he's meting out. Oh, sure it's only bugs,
but when you're down you pity even them.
At least I do. My self-indulgent soul
begins to think it is a moth. I pray,
God bless the moth, whose nervous system just
says *light, light, light, light, light*—the thing it loves.
Or maybe worship is a better word
for love *ex nihilo*. I've learned to gauge
the loudness of the noise and estimate
what bug is zapped. Large ones fight back. Mosquitoes
distintegrate in one electric snap.

The thin sweet smell of malathion drifts
over the hedge. Some folks can't take the world,
its flaws—my neighbor's one, and so am I,
although I lack his energy. I've heard
that swifts, attracted by the bugs, can fall
into the light, their scorched wings battering
the blue current. Sometimes they make it out.
It's fifty-fifty—live or die—I'd guess.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Idly, I slap mosquitoes as they land,
and if they leave a spot of blood, it's shared:
once mine, then theirs, now mine again. The moths,
when I go in and douse the light, possess
no purpose in their lives—not even death—
beating into the darkness and the trees,
where they don't want to fly—as once, sleepless,
I stood right here and watched the opposite:
two barn owls flying hard across the dawn
—no longer hunting, hurrying toward darkness—
paler, paler, until they disappeared
in the failure of the eye in too much light.

Fruit

Each year I prune the fig or it will choke
with growth. The suckers shoot in every gap
or lunge into the sky. With lopping shears
I cut them flush against the limb, amazed
what steel and leverage will do to wood.
I prune to make the tree more logical,
a crazy thought. A fig tree wants to fill
the world with leaves. But I want fruit from it.
I squeeze the handles closed, and tempered blades
snip off limbs thicker than my thumb. I cut,
go slow, study, applying logic where
its ruthlessness will not be loved till spring,
when primitive soft fruit swells on the bough.
Those almost shapeless gobs of sugar, seeds,
and flesh will fall apart and melt like jam
inside my mouth—in summer, when they're ripe.
I oil the pruning shears and put them up,
leaving the tree alone to do its work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Worlds

The bubble shuddering above my hand
mirrors, distorted on its skin, the world.
Dark pines bend inward on the sphere. Bright stars
bunch tightly in an arch across the curved,
diminished night. They blur into one pale
remnant of light above the oval moon.

It hits my hand, bounces, and in mid-bounce—
a graininess. The skin dissolves. Thin drops
quiver in air, still spherical, then fall
across my palm like night rain on a field.
The small night flies into the larger night,
where sweep from star to star is firmly spaced,
one sun behind the next, a billion miles
from where I stand, my palm damp with the world
I held, however small or misshaped, on my hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT SCHULTZ

January 1, 1987

Snow on the ground since mid-November
But no deep plunges through zero yet.
Just weeks of sky pulled taut in sheets.
So we live our days, crush white underfoot,
See white overhead at chimney-height
And sleep at night between two white sheets.
We sleep in blackness hard as ice,
Obsidian ice we might chip with flint
If we reached our arms to strike at its flanks.
But we keep our arms under heavy blankets
And tangle our warmth in a knot we know
That will hold 'til morning, hold until morning
Again and again as the white disc arcs
Degree by degree through its lens of sky
To sharper focus: buds in their sheaths
Split green at last.

In This Dark Pool, Our Marriage Bed

In this dark pool, our marriage bed,
We dove all night while the temperature plunged
And our exhalations froze on windows.

Morning's light shone dully like ivory.
Every pane bristled thick with frost: chevrons,
Flame-shapes, coral, barbed-wire—

Hundreds of night forms shaken from air
And fastened here by pins of ice.
"Look at the woods." You pointed at trunks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unmistakably scrawled on sparkling glass.
Beneath them patchworks of squares and wedges
Suggested a town, but dwarfed by ferns.

Above, collisions of thrusting crystals
Jammed a small sky.
In every window the white ghosts climbed.

It troubled me, so I looked away.
But knuckles could not rub from my eyes
Our world drawn flat and crystallized

In stretched perspective—a chaos or cosmos
I could not tell; it glittered, opaque.
I finally answered, "It bothers me," then

Rubbed the bright pane with a freezing thumb
To open an eye-hold. Cold flames burned,
But a clear space showed. I knelt and looked,

Saw the whitened yards, the buffeted houses,
Streets in grids as if perfect crystals.
I saw them as if they were etched on glass.

Only scattered pines held a dark
Blue light, their centers deep coves
Where the sparrows swam.

Two or Three Dreams of Spring

1

I step out onto
The open porch,
The long waiting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally over.
An all night rain
Has melted the snow,

The glassy mounds,
And water stands
In stunned, brown grass.

The first mild
Breezes smell like earth.
The flowering crab

(Was it always there
In the center of the yard?)
Is already open!

I lean against
The wooden porch-rail,
Take a deep breath,

Then wake in the dark—
Rub a hole with my fist
On frosted glass,

Look out on drifts.

2

I am out on the porch;
The long waiting
Is finally over.

Loose water pools
In greening grass.
The air smells of earth.

Warm breezes tangle
Purple lilacs,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whitening crabs.

Can this be a dream?
I rap my knuckles
Hard on the rail.

It hurts; it is real.
Then I wake, look out—
Hunched shoulders

Of snow.

3

On the far side of town
A thin, green fog—
The first split buds.

Nearer, a maple,
Its catkins hanging
Like Spanish earrings.

And the grass, having sipped
Its snowdrifts down,
Burns green as Ireland

While tulips burn
In their bed by the porch
An unearthly red,

A red that wounds
As a way to heal.
Can this be real?

Can this be real?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARK WILLIAMS

Refrigerator Queen

Some nights I remember when the stadium went black,
when for a second there was nothing but the stars:
small holes in the sky allowing light. Then one
spotlight touched a Chrysler, assembled at a local plant.
We cheered your float as it circled the field:
a giant, papier-mâché icebox with glitter handles.

I was young, and you were *Refrigerator Queen.*
This town was *Refrigerator Capital of the World*:
International Harvester, Servel, Seeger-Sunbeam.
Five thousand units a day. They ran down lines
filling trucks and trains and Ohio River barges.
Cold food for people everywhere. We celebrated

once a year. We called it *The Refrigerator Bowl.*
They played at Reitz High School, on the hill
near the Howell freight yards where the river bends
the way a football arcs across a field
connecting with a player's arms. We cheered
as your float circled the marching band.

The Chrysler stopped at the fifty yard line.
A college boy opened the icebox door
as music played, and you stepped into the song.
I was young, *but I still see you smiling as you turn*
and wave to us. I see him place a crown.
Then you take his hands in yours.

The stadium whistles as you kiss,
and he holds your sequined arms. I want
to know if it's the best your life has been.
I must have seen you since. It's a small town.
But I don't know. The lights came on so soon,
blurring your face; and the Chrysler pulling away.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Particulates

Mostly on the coldest winter mornings
as I walk down Frederick off Illinois,
I smell it first without remembering
what it is until I look. Dark smoke
rising from a white frame house,
its furnace filled with coal
stoking the sky with dust.

I breathe. I'm six or seven,
listening to my father tell
how it was when every house burned coal,
how the sun broke through at noon. Again
I breathe. I'm playing in a park, now,
with my sister. We see clouds:
black, lifting from the trees and breaking
into rising cries and wings. But then
I smell coal. I breathe as dark specks
rise above my neighbors' houses.
Starling eyes against the winter sky.

*

I buy and sell houses,
two and three bedroom bungalows
much like my neighbors' and my own.
"Cash For Homes," my ad says.
I walk through rooms. I measure.
I poke my keys through floor joists
and marvel at the termite tunnels
that weave like veins down runs of timber.

In older houses, in basement corners,
two wooden walls project and make a room.
Inside, I find a light string.
I see a metal chute
opening through a block foundation
where coal once poured and stained
the walls that surround me there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*

I have a friend afraid of basements.
He stops above his steps, perhaps tonight.
He did not know the man he found last month,
the dead man lying on a golf course.
But my friend breathed into that mouth,
and now his mind is filled with dying.
He can only stand above his stairwell.
He says he'll only walk through lighted rooms—
that he cannot close his eyes to sleep, and while
they're open he sees that face, those lips
that part his bedroom ceiling.

*

When I was twelve, I'd lie in bed awake
and watch a doctor, in another place,
hold my lungs up to a light. He'd point
to small dark spots and, quietly, say
it was common in our valley where
dust is trapped; but that my lungs would,
mostly, clear, given cleaner air and time.

I'd shut my eyes and breathe and think a color:
red, *blue*, *green*, or *yellow*.
When it appeared I'd cough and watch
as black specks rushed the colored stars,
specks flying from my chest and mouth
until the branches, mostly, cleared.

*

I try to see my friend in houses with me,
where I have pulled a light string
and coal dust fills the walls
behind brittle yellow calendars,
where we can turn to workbenches
or to Ball jars of tomatoes, plums,
real peaches lining shelves
and preserves of every color, where,
soon, he's strong enough to turn again,
to pull the string, to dim at least
the spotted walls around us.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1959

My mother and father are
talking in low tones in the dark
of the front seat. I can see
stars streaking across the window.
No, not streaking . . . they are still.
The radio changes from song to talk
after I lie quietly for a long time
with my head on the white pillow.
They know I am awake, but our lives
are not the same at such
an age, so they don't care
if I listen to their wish
for a better life, the white-stone house
with many windows, worn by wind
and rain, another son,
concern for Uncle Harlan,
sick last winter, thinner and thinner
until the sickness lifted
like a veil and he came back to us.
They do not even
turn their heads, watching
that island of light before their eyes
pierced by a line that lasts always
as long as the night.
Around the profile of my mother's cheek
the dial light shines.
She brings
her hand, hung over the seat,
along the neck of my father,
then lays her palm open on his shoulder.
The road rushes under us,
leaving my mother inclining.
She is frail

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in sleep
and lightly breathing,
belying the silence that survives
vivid as these lights
beamed to high
the instant I fall asleep.

An Actual Wife

The hermit has trampled a path
through old apple trees leading into the valley,
ripping the vines and hacking
the branches down. And now at twilight
we can see the ancient glow
of his light below the mountain, a flicker,
otherwise lost in haze,
ribbons of chimney smoke lifted high, spiralling,
diminishing in the wind
of late October. Where does he get
his sustenance? Why has he sequestered himself
down there? Standing on a rock
offering a view
of this valley, we can imagine the hermit
hauling wood, watched by his dog.
Did we hear the echo of an ax as we climbed the path
curving into the valley?
The surrounding pines, each of which knows
the hermit's face
by heart, utter a cry we identify as the whipporwill,
giving this scene
a grandeur that trandscends the ordinary
landscape, captured
in photographs. We can see the river
at this distance,
a silver crease, beautiful only to the true outsider.
Sunlight still shines
on the opposite side of the valley, solemnly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turned toward the hermit
speaking before he spits into his fire.
Does he have any faith
that he will change someday? No longer diffident?
No longer alone?
And yet remain the same? Does he wonder
if he's being watched by us?
And if he knew that we were talking here,
would be circle back,
confronting us with his gun, his curiosity satisfied
at last? What would he do
if we darkened his doorstep, peered
into his window,
certain we were seeking an illusion from above the valley?
Surely he would ask us
in, embarrassed by the scarcity of chairs.
Surely he would explain
why he came to live here in the valley,
clearing a path
opening out over the highway above our house.
Perhaps he actually has
an actual wife, slender and serene,
reading before the fire
while he sleeps tonight, turning the pages slowly
as though the lines
were to be savoured at the bottom
of each page, closing
that book only when hope for the heroine
has been revived. Suppose
she never left him
fraught with incredible longing.
Why does he leave his light on for so long?
What does he do all night?
Does he have a donkey? A guitar?
Meanwhile, we linger
here, reluctant to let go of our view
of the valley
we cannot imagine without the hermit,
habitually grim,
gazing up at us from far below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PHILIP LEVINE

These Streets

If I told you that the old woman
named Ida Bellow was shot to death
for no more than $5 and that a baby
of eighteen months saw it all from
where she wakened on the same bed
but can't tell because she can't speak,
you'd say I was making it up. If I
took you by the hand and led you down
street after street until we arrived
at a door that seemed no different
from the rest and entered to behold
the flowered coverlet not yet washed
on the single iron bed, the calendar
stopped on the second Sunday in February,
the cluttered three-burner stove, the sink
of cracked dishes, the old wheelchair
Ida used to get around, you'd stand
in the middle of the bare floor as far
from everything as you could get
listening to the cracked window moan
and see nothing. The baby's mother—
she's only nineteen—says she'll raise
the baby by herself now Ida's gone,
and she's not going to cry about it,
no, not in front of us two. No.
It was Cabin, the neighbor lady says,
Ida raised him from a child, raised
him up to this, and raised his sisters,
too, and she counts them off on her fingers,
one, two, three, four, she counts them off.

*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Why did we come here to begin with?
There was a pond once, and a path
small creatures took into the woods.
Brown warblers called down the first light,
and we woke with it to the long days
bursting with sudden anemones, iris
growing wild, purple throated finches
as small as canaries tumbling the air.
In late summer tall grasses grew, and we
hid side by side from the heavy sun, hid
in our own neat bed of broken reeds,
a little cup the earth made for us.
Our breath came and went. The sky passed
overhead still unstreaked by the geese
heading down from Canada, unmarred
by anything except the clouds massing
toward late afternoon. Yes, it was August
once, and the west wind was warm, even
at sunset. When I closed my eyes I
slept, when I opened them I saw a river
of stars overflowing their back bowl.

*

Six floor walk-ups, half the windows
boarded up, the doorways bricked over.
Still some families hanging on, kids
flood into the ruined streets morning
after morning on their way to school.
When it dies down, stray animals pick
over the rubbish, a family of four cats
exits the innards of a blooming sofa.
Between 9:30 and afternoon not
a single car starts up or passes down
the street. In the corner grocery
three lop-sided apples on special,
30 cents each. The woman says it's
a good neighborhood, ain't no violence
here, ain't no trouble. A man comes
out of the back room and stares
at me until I look away. No one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

speaks, not even the radio. The light
of the world filters down from shelves
of Brillo, bright packages of detergent,
paper diapers, roach motels, white
stale saltless crackers. Moment
by yellow moment the day ticks into
the past, and no one tries anything.

JOHN RIDLAND

To Helen

On desperate seas long wont to roam
—Poe

Helen, I see you in a white
Soft T-shirt, bleached-blue jeans or cords,
Your brown hair neck-length, loose and neat—
Nothing like how you looked the night
  When you leaped trafficwards.

You speak straight at me where I sit
Beyond surprise: *If I had known*
What I have gathered after it,
It's something I would not have done—
  And then you moan.

Helen, I start, and lean to reach
Your gentle, youthful, hopeless crying,
But you turn toward the window-niche,
Backlit by innocence, through which
  I see your childhood lying.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a special issue
in two volumes

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

edited by

NICHOLAS DELBANCO

An autobiographical essay by Bernard Malamud • Joyce Carol Oates on "Beginnings" • A jeremiad on the star system by George Garrett • Ihab Hassan on the fiction of adventure • Gregory L. Morris and Scott R. Sanders: two essays on Nature and new fiction • Constance Pierce on popular culture and contemporary fiction • Paul West: True and False Modernism • On teaching fiction-writing in the university, by David R. Slavitt • An interview with Max Apple

*

A symposium of 85 distinguished fiction writers on the theory and practice of contemporary fiction

*

New short fiction by Andrea Barrett, Susan Keith Bryant, Stephen Dixon, Stephen Dunning, Richard Elman, Wanda Haynes Fries, Eugene Mirabelli, Gloria Whelan—and a long story by Lynne Sharon Schwartz

*

Reviews by Charles Baxter (the short story), Jefferson Humphries (theory of fiction), Anne Redmon (fiction by women), and others

*

A portfolio of satirical drawings by M.G. Lord

*

Fall 1987—$6 Winter 1988—$6

Michigan Quarterly Review

The University of Michigan 3032 Rackham Building Ann Arbor, MI 48109

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LOUIS SIMPSON

A Visitor

Words are chalked on the blackboard
under a heading: "Trends:
INDIVIDUALIZE
PRIVATIZE
DEBUREAUCRATIZE."

I read poems and answer questions:
"What's your favorite Rock group?" . . .
from parted lips, the breath of Spring,
shining eyes fixed on me.

I admit my ignorance of music
and some exchange glances.
What can he have to tell us
we'd ever want to listen to?

"DEREGULATE
DECENTRALIZE (LOCALIZE)
PUBLICIZE"

"What made you want to be a writer?"

Summer, the sea rolling in . . .
I had just changed for a swim
and emerged from the lockers
when a girl came towards me . . .
gray eyes, long golden hair.
Her eyes met mine and stayed
and I felt a blow that took my senses
away. They flew and clung to her,
to her every look and word
and every movement of a limb.

I dreamed through my adolescence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and thought and wrote about her.

That's how poetry begins:
in youth, with a vision of beauty.
Read Dante, *La Vita Nuova*.
But now I have to catch my plane.
It's been good . . .

For God's sake, use your brains!
God knows you'll need to
in a world that uses words like
DEINSTITUTIONALIZE
BUSINESSIZE
VOLUNTEERIZE (OR POLITICALIZE).

I'll just give the blackboard
a quick wipe before I go.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Boy Crazy

I used to watch the roses loosen
their pink wigs as I clocked the rain.
One-two, one-two, the drops plunked
the petals down into the gutter.
Drenched, I strolled my way into town
hoping to meet the boy I shuddered
to think of, the boy with hair black
as patent leather, the boy with the sneer
that dangled like a cigaret from his lips.
I was feverish with innocence, my skin
aglow, my shadow almost voluptuous.
Past the blue houses and an old Volvo
backfiring from an alley, past
The Lighthouse where once Dizzy Gillespie
had blown me a kiss when I was twelve,
past the Mermaid Restaurant where I first
saw my father flirt with a fierce waitress,
I finally footed my way to the pier.
Only one fisherman crouched near a pail
of squid, and his hair was yellow.
The sound of rain was swallowed by waves
pounding the shore with white fists.
Over Catalina half a rainbow perched
like a tweezed eyebrow raised in surprise.
I kept track of how late he was
while clouds paired up on the horizon,
and the minutes fell away like bits
of torn paper into the surf below.
But, he came after all. Dizzy, elated,
faint with restraint, I played it cool.
Kiss me, kiss me, he whispered, sneering
his powerful sneer as he bent over me,
his thin hands cupping the two blades

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of my shoulders. Hot ice was what I felt—
a melting and stiffening, a strange tug
in my thighs, blood rushing my ears.
At last he had to go home, and so did I.
But I stayed and swayed on the pier
to watch the wing-rowing pelicans pause
in mid-air before they released themselves
from their bodies' bows, and dove into
the amethyst waters below.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BARRY SPACKS

Inheritors

In the time of friendly ghosts, the hour of almost waking,
I was given to see
My grey suit and my white suit and my hanging shirts, how
they would be
After I die.
Sent to the Good Will, the Salvation Army,
They wait among stranger-garments in the shops there,
The Thrift Store.
Streetmen, young actors, mothers of families
(Who remember everybody's size)
Touch their shoulders, my clothes, in passing;
One stops, at my drawstring pants, my brown-check
sweater or my blue:
An appraising look—this might do—
A lifting off the rack.

I feel pity for them, like dogs without masters;
Sorrow at their isolation, without me to understand them
Who know so well all their uses and failings,
The spot, the hole, the tendency to wrinkle,
The dashing combinations.
Listen, clothing, you will live again.
Some craggy-faced guy from Oklahoma
Will fit the white suit, for seven dollars,
Get a compliment from a drinking buddy
At Hobey's Country Music Bar,
Crack a shy grin, tip out a Pall Mall, looking sharp,
Cross-legging the crisp-creased trousers:
"Yessir, feelin' riiight!"

And the three-piece grey
Goes to a young guy with his woman friend.
"Hey, look'it this, nine bucks," he tells her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Try it on," she says. "Let's see the vest. Check out
the trousers."
Someday they'll pull them off, in a hurry for love.
Later, thoughtful, he'll iron the creases right, hung on
a wooden hanger.
And there'll be kids to wear my blue and my brown-check
sweater,
Husbands tying my six ties, Grandfathers in my shoes.
The underwear, of course, the underwear, too intimate,
burns with the burning.
But the rest, out there, gaining new affections, goes on
from me,
From my airy, smoky body
That once buttoned these cuffs,
Put keys in these pockets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALFRED DORN

In Afternoon Light

Lying on a white tablecloth,
a loaf of bread
and its shadow
make an abstraction.

Bread keeps its form
like the crusty earth:
I recall seeing in Pompeii
loaves from 79 A.D.

But shadow
alters its shape
because light
changes like a mind.

The one fills hollows
of hunger, the other
shows the impalpable
skin of a hidden dimension.

We are body—and also
the shifting chiaroscuro
of the invisible—
fed by bread and fed by shadow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Apparition

I have known many ghosts
and have stared them down—
all except one.

Returning one night to the hollow house,
I opened a closet
to look for something lost.

I drew back,
faced with an apparition
pink as a blush:

a silk nightgown
she would never wear again,
hanging there like skin.

Quickly I closed the door.
I had forgotten
what I was looking for.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RICHARD HORNBY

The London Theatre

THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THE LONDON THEATRE SEASON last year was the large number of American plays being performed. The year before, to attract the dwindling numbers of American tourists, there were big name stars in flimsy plays that were British written but American in orientation; last year, there were ensemble productions of solid plays from the traditional American repertoire, which was better all around. The West End, London's Broadway, had more American standards running than our own Broadway did, which says a lot about the state of commercial theatre in both countries!

I saw good productions of Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and Holm and Abbott's *Three Men on a Horse*; a production of Moss Hart's *Light Up the Sky* opened just after I left. I also managed to see the musicals *High Society* (based on the film), *Follies*, and *Kiss Me Kate*. The British generally do not do musicals as well as we do. When British musicals succeed in the United States (e.g., *Cats, Me and My Girl, Les Misérables*), it is more a result of the acting or scenery than the book, music, or dancing; when American musicals succeed in London, there are usually Americans involved in the staging. Thus *Follies* and *Kiss Me Kate* were wonderful largely because of their American choreographers, Bob Avian and Ron Field. *High Society* was one hundred percent British, and vapid; the choreography was unfocussed and perfunctory, the dancing of it stiff. And British musical comedy orchestras do not sound as good as ours; I have never heard one that had the drive, balance, and crispness of a good Broadway orchestra.

The best production of an American play was not on the West End, but at the National Theatre, where Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* starred Michael Gambon. Though little known in the United States, Gambon has become a major British actor. Massive in body, with a large, chunky face, he has an advantage in being able to look like a worker. In Britain as in America, most actors look middle class, even when their origins are humble. (In the latter case, their biographies typically stress how they did not fit into their early surroundings.) But Gambon has the physical strength, the stolidity, the roughness, and the raw emotional power that the role of Eddie Carbone requires. At the same time, he is a precise, subtle actor, fully capable of intellectual roles too. This is important in *View*, because Eddie is far from stupid; he has a strong moral code,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and is constantly observing, evaluating, and questioning. Gambon always gave you these two sides of Eddie; in the drunk scene, for example, he was magnificent, both lumbering and tortured. Impulsively kissing his niece and then the young Italian immigrant boy who loves her seemed both shocking and inevitable. This was the best production of the play I have ever seen, better than the good New York production a few years ago with Tony LoBianco.

Such a flawless production provided a good chance to re-evaluate Miller's play, which is not usually ranked among his best. A common complaint, based upon the fact that Miller himself is Jewish, is that the characters do not really seem Italian. This may be so in some productions, but here every element, from the effective set, designed by Alan Tagg, with its dark wallpapered walls decorated with fading pictures of saints and old country family members, to the way the actors positioned themselves, gestured, and spoke, seemed genuinely Italian-American. The superb cast included Elizabeth Bell as the wife, Susan Sylvester as the niece, Adrian Rawlins as her cheery immigrant lover, and Michael Simkins, dark and powerful (important, because he must be a match for Eddie) as his brother—all solid English names, but real Italians could not have been more convincing.

A more valid criticism of the play is that it is overly psychologized; Eddie's motivations are dark and complex, yet ultimately all too obvious: he is driven by sexual desire for his niece, and a deeper, unconscious attraction for the young Italian immigrant with whom she falls in love. This is Actors' Studio stuff, circa 1950, and Miller would have been better off if he had never gone near the place, because he is not really a psychological playwright by nature, but rather an ethical one. The exquisitely balanced moral dilemmas are what make his dialogue effective and the action compelling. Thus Eddie is torn between his attraction to his niece and his genuine desire to help her. His warnings to his niece are not mere rationalizations; as an illegal immigrant, the boy would indeed be likely to engineer a phony marriage just to stay in the country. The secondary characters find themselves facing similarly conflicting moral demands: The niece loves the boy, but also feels deep love and gratitude toward her uncle; Eddie's wife is torn between her duty to her husband and to her niece. After Eddie has betrayed the boy and his brother to the immigration authorities, the brother is torn between his desire for revenge, and his duty to his family back in Italy, who will starve if he is imprisoned for killing Eddie. Miller is terrific at this sort of thing, but when he wanders down the path of pop psychology, the result is mundane and dull.

The Royal Shakespeare Company continues its troubled course. Trevor Nunn, whose personal enrichment from company successes transferring to the commercial theatre came under serious question in 1986, has resigned as artistic director, to be replaced by Terry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hands, Nunn's co-director since 1978. Financial problems continue; the weak season of 1986 left the company a million pounds in debt, with little hope for assistance from the penurious and philistine Thatcher government. The RSC now negotiates better terms for itself from transferred successes, but still takes only two and a half percent of the gross, in contrast to the five percent commanded by the National Theatre.

All this has not stopped the company from expanding, which is perhaps a wise decision, since some of its best productions are being performed outside its major theatres, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford and the Barbican in London. A new theatre, the Swan, funded by a private donor, has been built in Stratford, specifically for staging plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries. In addition, the RSC has taken over the Mermaid Theatre in London, and rebuilt the interior to turn it into a counterpart of the Swan. I saw several fine productions from the Swan's first season that had transferred to the Mermaid: *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *Every Man in His Humour* by Ben Jonson, and *The Fair Maid of the West* by Thomas Heywood.

Performing Shakespeare's contemporaries is an admirable plan. Many good plays from the period are rarely produced simply because they have been eclipsed by Shakespeare's. Yet we have only thirty-six extant plays by Shakespeare (thirty-seven if you include the co-authored *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which the RSC had *never* before produced), so that if your average Shakespeare Festival performs as few as four per season it will exhaust the canon in less than a decade. The best plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries are certainly better than his worst, but that is not really the strongest argument for going beyond Shakespeare in performing plays from the period. Fletcher, Jonson, and Heywood, like their other contemporaries, are not as good as Shakespeare—no one is—but they should be considered not as second-rate Shakespeares but rather as their first-rate selves. They are *different* from Shakespeare, as different as Strindberg or Björnson were from Ibsen, and their work should be valued for each one's unique qualities.

The first part of Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West,* for example, is a comedy of raffish life in Elizabethan England of the sort that Shakespeare never wrote (all his plays are set long ago or far away or both); the second part is an exotic adventure something like Shakespeare's late romances, but more childlike and innocent in tone. The plot is simple and loose: A pert but chaste serving girl in a tavern falls in love with a sea captain. He sails away, leaving her in charge of a tavern he owns; she manages it well, easily taming the lively assortment of customers and suitors that abound there, including a swaggering bully named Roughman. The captain is wrongly reported dead; the fair maid takes her inheritance from him to outfit a ship and captain it herself. Part I ends with her cap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turing a fort in the Azores; Part II continues her exotic adventures, including a period spent in the court of a Moroccan king. In the end, she is of course reunited with her lover, after numerous mishaps, fallings in and out of favor, and a near execution.

The production at the Mermaid, directed by Trevor Nunn (he remains associated with the company), was energetic and charming. The theatre features a small thrust stage, with the audience on three sides, a configuration something like that of an indoor "private" theatre of Elizabethan times, though by no means an archeological reconstruction. Nunn used the space well, evoking the various locales with a few simple prop changes, and using the entire auditorium when necessary; the battle scene was one of the best I have ever experienced, with guns and cannons going off, sword fights around and among the audience, and actors swinging by ropes above them, all endlessly lively, varied, and funny. The play took on the feel of a good children's theatre production, with simple, bold characterizations, and much byplay with the audience, including ironic mocking of the very conventions that were being established. The pacing was always swift, and the entire cast performed with a good feel for the naive style of the piece; Imelda Staunton was delightful as the lively little maid, and Pete Postlethwaite especially hilarious as the braggart Roughman.

Another strong RSC production was Vladimir Gubaryev's *Sarcophagus* in The Pit, the small open performance space underneath the main theatre at the Barbican. Dealing with the Chernobyl disaster, the play was written only two months after the event by—believe it or not—the science editor of *Pravda*, and had never even been performed by a major theatre in the U.S.S.R. when it was picked up by the British director Jude Kelly and the subsequent translator of the piece, Michael Glenny. The whole business sounds wonderfully cloak and dagger; the play, like the disaster itself, is no doubt being used by the Gorbachev faction in the Soviet Union as a weapon against entrenched bureaucracy, and its performance in London must be a victory of some kind. I was therefore intrigued when I went to the theatre, but did not expect much dramatically—perhaps a simple agitprop piece, or else a sentimental story of love and patriotism among the engineers.

I could not have been more wrong. *Sarcophagus* is a tightly written, gripping play; the characters are sharply drawn, the situation imaginative, the action clear, the implications broad. (It is much better than the film, *China Syndrome*.) The setting is a clinic for treating radiation victims, apparently a sleepy place with but a single patient, a man who received a fatal dose because of drunkenness, but who has in fact survived 487 days, a record. Bald with a few weird tufts of hair, scarred from innumerable operations, horribly discolored, and with a few remaining teeth jutting out at odd angles, the "Immortal" (nicely played by Nick Woodeson) is nonetheless puckish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and witty; having nothing to lose, he can say whatever he likes, and becomes in the course of the play our *raisonneur*.

Suddenly the clinic is galvanized with news of the Chernobyl disaster; as victims pour in, we note with irony that although the explosion was tiny in comparison with a single nuclear bomb, the clinic has shifted from being almost empty to being overtaxed. By setting the play in a clinic in this way (echoing such Russian classics as Chekhov's *Ward 6* and Solzhenitsyn's's *Cancer Ward*), Gubaryev has deftly justified showing us a cross section of Russian society. An investigation follows, which of course must take place at the clinic because of the illness of the patients, but which also justifies a lot of exposition about the explosion. The investigation becomes an indictment of the Russian system. The manager of the power plant is one of the patients (poetic license—this was not so at Chernobyl); since the Russian system rewards only output rather than quality or safety, he has a spotless record, but he has at last been disciplined by reality itself.

Dramatic use is made of the fact that initially there are no symptoms of radiation poisoning. Many of the patients are at first amazed to find themselves at the clinic at all, but they gradually sicken. Emergency lights outside each patient's door signal a crisis within; when one of them flashes, it is bluntly dramatic. The flashing accelerates, until most are dead. It looks as if the manager might survive; the record-holding Immortal even offers his own bone marrow for a transplant, not out of kindness, but because he feels that the man should live as a warning to others. Nevertheless, the manager succumbs, and the clinic returns to its initial, somnolent state. The hideous Immortal, now recognizable as one of the holy fools that abound in Russian literature, calmly chalks up his 488th day.

The mainstage offerings at the RSC Barbican were not nearly as good as *Fair Maid* or *Sarcophagus*. Readers of these pages may sometimes have suspected me of being infected with theatrical Anglophilia; if so, the antidote was surely the RSC production of *Macbeth*. Ill-conceived, ill-spoken, ill-favored, and illogical, it was by far the worst professional production of the play that I have seen—and I've seen a lot of bad ones. Jonathan Pryce, a coarse actor, snorted, panted, twitched, and grimaced in the title role, taking perverse pleasure in misplaced emphases, odd pauses, and speaking to the wrong person. Bob Crowley's sterile set shrank as the action proceeded, a bright idea that enabled spears to be thrust through the walls at a cowering Macbeth at the end (apparently Malcolm's army was made up of Zulu warriors), but which required several scenes to be cut, and which destroyed the rhythms and progression of the final act, which are arguably the best in all drama.

Adrian Noble directed this abysmal *Macbeth*, but Terry Hands's inept and cumbersome production of Genet's *The Balcony* on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same stage was equally bad. Barry Kyle's production of *Richard II* had a lovely set by William Dudley, in the style of the *Book of the Hours*, and an interesting performance by Michael Kitchen as a shrewd, politic, Richard Nixonish Bolingbroke, but Jeremy Irons was a poor Richard indeed. His voice, perhaps damaged from smoking, was weak and raspy, his performance clichéd; Bolingbroke not only won the throne, he won the acting honors too.

For the past several years, the best Shakespearean productions in London were ironically not at the namesake RSC, but at the National Theatre, which in 1987 offered a good *King Lear* and an outstanding *Antony and Cleopatra*. Standing serenely on its magnificent site on the south bank of the Thames, the huge theatre complex manages a consistency no other English-speaking theatre can match; if they are rarely adventuresome, they are rarely awful, and when they are good they are very good indeed. When I first saw it, I hated the big gray clunky concrete building, which seemed to suggest heaviness and complacency; it was also far from any stop on the underground, and impossible to find your way around in when you got there. Now, after ten years, I've learned to use the busses, which stop alongside it on Waterloo Bridge, and I've gradually memorized the perversities of its layout. The buffets and bars are good, and the terraces offer a magnificent view across the Thames of the entire city. But most important, the theatres themselves are marvelous, with good sightlines and acoustics, and a sense of intimacy even from the back rows. In 1987, the tiny "black box" Cottesloe Theatre offered the *View from the Bridge* already mentioned, plus a good production of Lorca's *Yerma*, and an indifferent one of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. The proscenium Littleton Theatre had Brian Friel's adaptation of *Fathers and Sons*, with good performances by the fathers (Alec McCowen and Robin Bailey, plus Richard Pasco, excellent as the uncle) and weak ones by the sons (Ralph Fiennes and Robert Glenister); a lively English farce from the twenties, *Tons of Money*; and Molière's *School for Wives*, with a hideously inappropriate setting by Pamela Howard, but good performances by David Ryall and Julia Ford. The large, open-staged Olivier Theatre offered, in addition to the *Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, a superb production of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, sensitively directed by Michael Rudman, and a production of Alan Ayckbourn's amazing new play, *A Small Family Business*, directed by the author himself.

Anthony Hopkins was a fine King Lear, ably supported by a strong cast, especially Michael Bryant as Gloucester and Anna Massey as Goneril. The production was hamstrung by David Hare's inept direction, however; the big stage was generally kept bare and unarticulated, with actors floating about or taking meaningless positions. One example out of very many of the wretched blocking occurred when Lear brought in Cordelia's body: Hare had Hopkins

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Photo credit: John Haynes

Miranda Foster, Judi Dench, Helen Fitzgerald, Anthony Hopkins, and Jeremy Flynn in "Anthony and Cleopatra"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

place her on a table, and then sit down behind it for his final speech, effectively disappearing from half the audience. British actors have a reputation for bowing to directorial authority more readily than Americans, but here was one occasion when a touch of star temperament in rehearsals would have helped.

The best Shakespeare in town was Peter Hall's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Sold out for months (unusual in London), it may eventually come to the United States, which would be a blessing. Hopkins' Antony was the equal of his Lear, and Judy Dench was a glorious Cleopatra. Dench, despite looking like the middle-aged English housewife that she is, managed to be beautiful, sexy, funny, and tragic, easily the equal of Vanessa Redgrave in the fine 1986 production on the West End. Tim Pigott-Smith, of *Jewel in the Crown* fame, spoke the verse beautifully as a strong, austere Octavius; Michael Bryant, perhaps the best supporting actor in the world, was a pensive, yet vivid Enobarbus. I had thought that the Redgrave production (with Timothy Dalton, now the latest James Bond, as Antony) was the best I had ever seen; this production matched its star performances, and, having the resources of a great repertory company, surpassed it in the supporting roles.

Alan Ayckbourn's dramatic vision becomes ever more grim, and ever more funny. At the beginning of summer, two of his plays were running in London simultaneously: on the West End, *Woman in Mind*, about a woman gradually slipping into schizophrenia; and at the National Theatre, *A Small Family Business*, about an honest businessman gradually slipping into corruption, prostitution, drug-dealing, and murder. Both were hilarious.

At the beginning of *A Small Family Business*, a successful businessman (solidly performed by the protean Michael Gambon) is brought in to manage his father-in-law's firm. An amiable fellow, he is nonetheless efficient, and scrupulously honest. He is therefore naturally appalled to uncover a conspiracy of pilfering, kickbacks, and selling of industrial secrets by the employees, many of whom are relatives. His attempts to clean things up are thwarted by everyone else's indifference; even his family view his honesty as something to be tolerated rather than emulated. Then his daughter is caught shoplifting at a local store; to get her off, he agrees to hire the store detective to investigate his own firm, an apparently mild form of bribery that ultimately leads him into complicity with his corrupt employees, and beyond them the Mafia. In the end, he has even reluctantly agreed to a drug deal, not realizing that his daughter is herself an addict; our last view is of her sitting in the bathroom, blearily stoned, while the deal is struck in the living room below.

The result is pure Aristotelian tragedy, in which the hero brings about his own fall, by injuring someone near and dear to him in an act committed in ignorance. The audience, however, never stopped laughing. Ayckbourn achieves this by keeping us at a distance from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his characters, a kind of Brechtian "alienation." None of them is ever as aware as we are of what is happening; they are typically too involved with their own obsessions to be sensitive to others or to the overall situation. One character in *A Small Family Business* is a compulsive but terrible cook, interested only in getting money to open a restaurant; his wife, naturally, is anorexic! Neither has any sympathy for, or even much interest in, the other. With their narrowness of vision, characters react to events in incongruous, and hence funny, ways; Lady Macbeth may say, "a little water clears us of this deed," but when the dopey daughter in this play finds herself in the similar situation of having to clean up after a violent death, she whines, "Oh, Dad. Why's it always me?"

With these plays, as with his previous *Chorus of Disapproval*, Alan Ayckbourn establishes himself as a major playwright. Now a Company Director at National (he also directed *Tons of Money* and *A View from the Bridge*!), he combines literary sophistication with theatrical expertise; he is prolific, imaginative, skillful, insightful. He deserves more serious attention than he has received.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New York University

Master of Arts Program in Creative Writing

Faculty 1987-1988

Poetry

Yehuda Amichai
Galway Kinnell
Sharon Olds
Mark Rudman
Philip Schultz
Luis Simpson

Fiction

Wesley Brown
E. L. Doctorow
Thomas Keneally
James Lasdun
Gloria Naylor
Lucy Rosenthal
Mona Simpson
Luisa Valenzuela
Hilma Wolitzer

Application deadline: February 14, 1988.

For more information about our program in creative writing, return the coupon below or call the Department of English: (212) 998-8816.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

New York University
Graduate School of Arts and Science
Department of English
M.A. Program in Creative Writing
19 University Place, Room 200
New York, N.Y. 10003
Attn.: Philip Schultz
Director

☐ Please send me information on the M.A. Program in Creative Writing.

Name_____

Address_____

City/State/Zip Code_____

New York University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BERT CARDULLO

Working Girls, Playful Boys

WORKING GIRLS IS DISGUSTING. Disgusting because of its subject (prostitution), because of its director's point of view, or want of it, on that subject, and because of its artlessness. Some people think that this film is a protest against prostitution, against prostitution's supposed exploitation of women. It is no such thing. First of all, prostitution exploits people, not just women, and it exists not simply because men want it to exist and have the money to ensure that it does. Prostitution exists because of the age-old battle between the sexes as well as because of the powerful male sex drive; it's certainly no accident that most of the men who visit prostitutes are married. Knee-jerk liberals and feminists think that prostitution is the quintessence of male exploitation of women. As usual, they're treating the symptom, not the cause: the love-hate relationship between the sexes, which women are as much responsible for as men, and which may have no solution, men and women being the imperfect (and interesting) creatures that they are.

Lizzie Borden, the director and the co-author of the screenplay, entitled her film *Working Girls* because, astonishingly, she literally conceives of prostitutes as *working girls* (why not working *women*, in the jargon of the day?). In an interview on the CBS television program "Nightwatch," Borden, contrary to those who praise her film as a protest against the sexual exploitation of women by men, argued that prostitution is women's *power* over men, one way for a woman to control a man. Yes, but at what price, and for what percentage of the female population? And what kind of power do these women purchase? (Do they even think about their work in this way?) I'd say it's of the most petty sort. Also, don't women in loving relationships already have sexual power? Lucy, the madam, has it in the film: she uses sex to get her boyfriend, Miles, to buy her expensive gifts. Why would women sell (Borden says "rent" in yet another insidious manipulation of language) their bodies in order to get more power? The prostitute Dawn, for example, has a boyfriend about whom she says at one point, "I can't wait to get out of this place and fuck my boyfriend. At least with him sex has some meaning." Are these the words of a woman who happily sells her body in order to dominate men?

Of course, many, if not most prostitutes sell their bodies because they are poor and believe they have little other choice. But *Working*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Girls is not about these women. Its main character is Molly (Louise Smith), who has degrees from Yale in English and art history. Molly works only two to three days a week at a Park Avenue brothel, but then what does this Yale grad do with the rest of her time? The film doesn't say beyond alluding to an interest of hers in photography. And if Molly does actually do something worthy of her education, why does she work as a prostitute to support herself? Is there nothing else she can do? (Even one of her "co-workers," the aging April, asks her, "If you have so many choices, what are you doing here?" Molly doesn't reply.) Molly complains sharply about the money she makes, so, morality aside, even the relatively little time she spends at the brothel per week can't be worth it.

Why did Borden make Molly a Yale graduate? She did this, I believe, because she speciously wanted to give prostitution a certain respectability, to make it seem that this was just another in a series of jobs for an educated New York woman who was trying to "find herself." (In the CBS interview, Borden said that the women in her film use prostitution to get what they want in life, then get out of prostitution; they don't let it use them.) Hah. The film itself belies this: Molly dislikes the work (does any prostitute *like* her work?) and, as I've noted, complains about how little money she's making. *She* feels, as do the other "working girls," that she's being exploited by the *madam* of the Park Avenue brothel where she works; so strongly do they all feel this that, when Lucy is away, they cheat her out of income.

In addition to her Yale degrees, Molly has a black female lover, with whom she lives and who, somewhat incredibly, doesn't know what kind of job Molly has. Why does she have a female lover? Not for reasons of character and theme—Molly's lesbian relationship isn't explored at all by Borden—but for reasons of fashion and pop psychology. Men are such pigs, you see, and at least Molly gets to bicycle home to Diane and Diane's little girl after a tough day of being exploited by men against her will. Spare me, Lizzie Borden.

I don't know why this film was made. Borden isn't sure what she thinks of prostitution, since her comments about it contradict her film on the subject, and since her film doesn't investigate the popular notion of prostitution as the male exploitation of women. As I said above, Lucy, the madam, is the only person accused of exploitation (I suppose the feminists will say she learned this behavior from men!). Most of the male customers are weak-willed caricatures, and several of them are very nice to the girls. The ending of *Working Girls* is probably the clearest indication of Borden's muddled thinking on the subject of prostitution. Molly quits the brothel after a long day; she's been working there for two months and has finally had enough. Exhilarated, she rides her bike home, stopping to buy flowers along the way. We might think, indeed, we should think, that, true to Borden's words in the CBS interview, Molly has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

used prostitution to get what she wants and is now getting out. Except that (1) she hasn't been making very much money as a prostitute and (2) she may continue working as the kept woman of one of her former customers. This character, Elliot Kanter, gives Molly his business card during their final meeting at the brothel and says he'll pay her so well for sex on the outside that she'll never have to be a "working girl" again. As she is getting ready to leave the brothel for the last time, Molly comes upon Elliot's card and carefully tucks it into her wallet. So much for her control of prostitution, as opposed to its control over her. So much for her control over men, who, it seems to me, do the controlling as long as they have plenty of money to satisfy their sexual desire.

Prick Up Your Ears is the love story of Joe Orton, the British playwright, and Kenneth Halliwell, his roommate of sixteen years. The male sex drive is so great that two homosexuals are the perfect match: neither can get enough of the other, and neither uses his body as a tool of sexual politics. The trouble begins when love enters into the matter, as it did for Orton and Halliwell; then homosexuals are subject to as many (if sometimes different) difficulties in their relationships as heterosexuals. Orton saw himself as a rationalist in an irrational world, an amoralist in a (hypocritically) moral world: thus his homosexuality was less the expression of his "sexual preference" than of his desire for constant and easy sexual gratification, which he could get from men but not from women. The film makes this clear in an incident from Orton's days at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Joe has a date with a young woman for some sort of outdoor celebration, to which he has also invited Halliwell, a fellow acting student with whom he is becoming friendly. When the woman resists Joe's quick advances off in the bushes, saying that she likes him but wants to take matters slowly, he tosses her aside and turns to the willing Halliwell. Orton had had aborted encounters with other girls in his native Leicester, just as he had had other, though tentative homosexual experiences before enrolling at RADA; but this incident, if it did not occur in fact, is invented by the screenwriter Alan Bennett to crystallize the difference between the two sexes for Orton, and his course becomes set.

Joe Orton wrote only seven plays before his death in 1967 at the age of thirty-four. He is best known for his two farces *Loot* (1964) and *What the Butler Saw* (1967), which satirize sacred British institutions at the same time as they poke fun in general at the volatile, confusing, neurotic, and diminished world of contemporary existence. Orton's achievement in these two plays, according to the critic C. W. E. Bigsby, was

> to give farce a new meaning, to make it something more than the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> coy trysting with disorder it had once been. For Orton, farce became both an expression of anarchy and its only antidote. In his plays, role playing is not a series of false surfaces concealing a real self; it is the total meaning or unmeaning of protagonists who survive by refusing all substance.

For Orton, as for other modernists, the power of dramatic character was broken primarily because character no longer had authority in the anxious world outside art. His view of dramatic character was clearly influenced by the absence of authority or autonomy in his own life, since homosexuality was a crime in England until 1967 and since, as a drug-user in addition, he was often the victim of police harassment. Orton's strategy for survival was to retreat into a mannered role playing that he then proposed as a model of social action and artistic creation. His art and his life were thus forms of revolt against the hypocrisy, inhumanity, and compartmentalization of contemporary existence: as much as he could in both, he abandoned notions of morality, social responsibility, and individual identity. The only correct response, for his characters as for himself, was to dissemble and practice the gratification of ambition as well as desire.

Ironically, the creed by which Orton lived and wrote is the one by which he died: he was bludgeoned to death in their small apartment by Kenneth Halliwell, who then killed himself. A failed writer and artist, Halliwell was obsessively jealous of his friend's literary success, which, as the older mentor, he had played a large part in making possible after they both left RADA and gave up trying to have acting careers. Kenneth was equally jealous of Joe's youthful good looks, charming personality, and voracious sexual appetite—for everyone, it seemed, except his roommate. Against great odds Orton had risen from the working class of Leicester and created himself anew: the middle-class Halliwell had helped him much of the time, then finally struck him down for his achievement. Farce, with its emphasis on action, instincts, and (human) objects, may have been the ideal outlet for Orton's modernist impulse. Tragedy, however, became the form of his life: he wanted to leave Kenneth, was strongly advised to leave by others, but his loyalty, gratitude, and pity toward his friend prevented him from going. Kenneth loved him, but Joe didn't love back—he felt himself incapable of love and didn't want it in any case. Yet he stayed with Kenneth, and he died for doing so.

Prick Up Your Ears is based on John Lahr's biography of Orton, which has the same title (*Prick Up Your Ears* was the alternate title, suggested by Halliwell, for *Up Against It*, a screenplay Orton was writing on commission for the Beatles at the time of his death). Lahr's biography is in turn based on his own research and on Orton's diaries, which have recently been published. Not everything in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the film is true to the letter of the biography and the diaries, but everything is true to the spirit of both. And Alan Bennett's dialogue even imitates Orton's own in lieu of Lahr's discussion of the plays themselves. One example. The chauffeur of Orton's producer, Oscar Lewenstein, arrives at 25 Noel Road, Islington, to pick Joe up for a meeting; it is the morning after the murder-suicide. When no one answers after repeated knocking, the chauffeur squints through the letter box and spots a man lying on the floor with his eyes closed (Halliwell). He asks the landlady if he may break the door down. She then asks her husband, "Can we break the door down?" He replies, "Certainly not. If there's damage to be done, call the police. That's their job." Quintessential Orton.

Prick Up Your Ears begins at the end, with the discovery of the dead bodies, then returns to this scene before concluding. Thus the film immediately announces its focus, as does Lahr's biography: the interdependence and inextricability of these two men's lives. But there's a vacuum at the center of the film where there's none in Lahr's book. Joe says to Kenneth at one point in the screenplay, "If it hadn't been you [who taught me and nurtured my talent], it would have been somebody else." Joe is wrong, but the film doesn't convince us that he is; Lahr's biography does. Joe *must* be wrong if this story is to have tragic substance. Alfred Molina plays Kenneth as a presumptuous, preening fop from start to finish; he paints him with brush strokes that are too broad, he plays him too big, and the result is that we never get the essence of Halliwell to which Orton was irresistibly attracted and from which he drew sustenance. Part of the problem is Molina's face, which has none of the delicateness that the real Halliwell's had. We don't understand why Halliwell was a commanding presence in Orton's life, though we do understand how Orton became a commanding presence in Halliwell's. Gary Oldman's performance puts the balance completely in Joe's favor from the first, and consequently, for all the charm and vibrancy this actor brings to the role along with an ability to maintain a slyness of surface that, paradoxically, both denies and gives his character depth, he fractures the film. We know why Halliwell wanted to remain with this Orton, but we don't know why Orton remained with this Halliwell. And thus the playwright's death is made to appear accidental instead of inevitable.

The director, Stephen Frears, who did the lovely and smart *My Beautiful Laundrette*, made two other mistakes in the casting of major roles (though his casting of the minor parts, particularly Orton's parents and his sister Leonie, is exquisite): Vanessa Redgrave as Margaret Ramsay and Wallace Shawn as John Lahr. No one disputes Redgrave's talent, but here she overpowers the role and nearly the film. We get very little of the personality of "Peggy" Ramsay, London's most powerful play agent in the 1960s, from Lahr's biography, so Redgrave appears to have invented one for her. And her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ramsay is far too "busy" and self-absorbed for my taste; she seems to be less Orton's agent than her own. In the book Ramsay is Orton's friend, even confidante. In the film she's a "fag hag" who would rather her young, pretty fag be straight and seducible. Instead of just being fascinated with the Orton persona, as I'm sure the real Ramsay was, she's fascinated by the Orton persona *as it pertains to her*, and such a development of the Ramsay character has no place in this film. Part of the problem is that much of the film comes in the form of her flashbacks, prompted by Lahr's questions: Frears and his screenwriter, Bennett, seem as a result to have felt obliged to put more emphasis than necessary on her in the flashbacks themselves. This brings us to the matter of Lahr's presence, as researcher and interviewer, in *Prick Up Your Ears*. Lahr is invisible in the book—we get no idea of his personality. Bennett puts him in the screenplay to supply connectiveness, to make comment, to elicit it, and, on the most basic level, so that the story can begin at the end—where it really started for most of us—and proceed through flashback. But this is not enough: to put Lahr in the film to such an extent and not have the actor who portrays him convey to us *Lahr's* fascination with Orton's life and work, is to make us question the biographer's presence on screen. And Wallace Shawn doesn't project this fascination—he may look vaguely like John Lahr but he doesn't create a character for the man, let alone a character completely absorbed in *someone else's* character. He might have been effective, even evocative, in voice-over, using language from the book to lead us into various scenes.

Obviously, I have mixed feelings about *Prick Up Your Ears*. I'm happy that this film exists, since it will introduce Orton, and Lahr's biography, to a wider audience. I'm unhappy that it fails to fulfill its cinematic mission: to establish the centripetal force of the Orton-Halliwell relationship. Lahr's words described this force; Frears's images could have personified it, could have made it as overpowering on screen as it was in these two men's lives. The close-up might have helped Frears to search out in Alfred Molina what this actor could not produce on his own, yet I can't recall any close-ups used to this end.

Ingemar is every bit as fascinating a character in the Swedish film *My Life as a Dog* as Joe Orton is in *Prick Up Your Ears*: charming but mischievous, sensitive but closed off, funny but moving. Except that Ingemar is only twelve years old. This film by Lasse Hallström, based on the novel by Reider Jönsson, has an aptly split focus between a slightly older Ingemar, trying to come to terms in voice-over with the death of his mother and his dog, and Ingemar as he actually lives through his mother's succumbing to tuberculosis and his dog's being put to sleep. The older Ingemar has already begun the empty process of rationalization that haunts us through adult-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hood; whenever we hear his voice comparing his plight with the much worse plights of other beings and deciding that he's not so bad off, we see a starry sky, which serves (comically) to mock his sureties with the mystery and indifference of the universe. The younger Ingemar lives the life of a dog, as it were: always getting into mischief but always eager to please, too. This Ingemar reacts instinctively to pain, anxiety, and unhappiness: refusing to take his jacket off at the hospital until he has been warmed by the presence of his mother, whom he will visit in her room; several times being unable to drink from a glass, his hands are trembling so much; angrily barking like a dog at his Uncle Gunnar, his guardian after his mother's death, for withholding from him the information that his pet has been put to sleep. With Ingemar's suffering comes much joy: he experiences the wonder of girls and the thrill of competitive sport; he treasures his mother's laugh, which he once elicited by doing a backflip and which scene, at a lake, he recalls again and again during the film; and he makes the acquaintance of a lush group of eccentrics—or adults who respond to the world with the impetuosity and honesty of children—in his uncle's village.

By the end of *My Life as a Dog*, Ingemar's voice-over rationalizing has ceased. His younger self has caught up with his older one, he has got beyond the deaths of his mother and his dog, and he's ready to enter his teens. When we last see him, he's asleep on a couch, arm-in-arm with his friend Saga, who has shed her tomboy pants for a dress. Ingemar seems to rest for the life as a man that awaits him. Throughout the film, Saga the tomboy has been teaching him to box, and he has taken his punches at the same time that he has learned to fight. Over the closing credits, we hear a radio broadcast of Ingemar Johansson's first heavyweight championship fight with Floyd Patterson. It's 1959. Ingemar has won—this time.

My Life as a Dog may be thought of as a comic *Forbidden Games*, though of course there is much seriousness in Hallström's film. (Life *is* serious, says Hallström—that's what punctures the child's world of play and hastens his growth into an adult.) René Clément's 1952 film is the best previous one about children that I know. Both works are concerned with children's reaction to death, both depict the growing friendship between a boy and a girl, and both place as much emphasis on the death of animals, in particular a dog, as on the death of humans. A death is a death to a child. *Forbidden Games* takes place during World War II, ends tragically, and has a good deal of the grotesque about it—the five-year-old Paulette and the eleven-year-old Michel turn death into play, creating an animal cemetery where her dog is buried, decorating it with crosses from the human cemetery as well as with small articles from the village church, and eagerly awaiting (even bringing about) the death of additional creatures. Their "forbidden game" is finally discovered and Paulette, an orphan, is separated from Michel forever. The adults

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

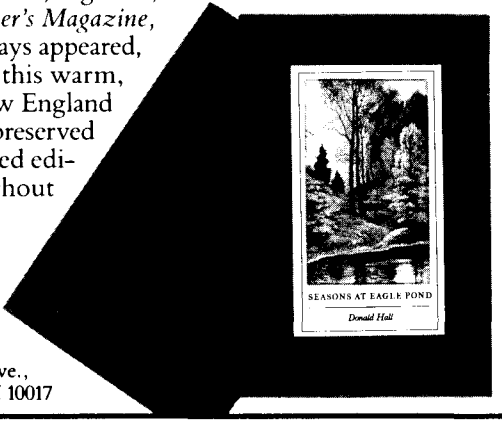
in *Forbidden Games* are stupid, ill-tempered, and insensitive—that's one reason the film ends as it does. The adults in *My Life as a Dog* are just the opposite: they provide an environment in which children can be themselves and flourish.

Some final words on the acting in Hallström's film. Everyone is good. Anton Glanzelius, as Ingemar, is extraordinary; his performance ranks with Brigitte Fossey's Paulette as the best by a child on film. Glanzelius' face is perfect, at once impish and affecting, and his actions reveal a trust in his own heart and in the eye of the camera that can rightly be called prodigious.

SEASONS AT EAGLE POND
Donald Hall

"There is no reason to live here except for love," writes Donald Hall of the 180-year-old farmstead, Eagle Pond, that was his grandparents' home and is now his. With his love of place and the powers of a poet, Hall chronicles the seasons in four essays—a remarkable blend of acute observation, vignette, and anecdote. Readers of Hall's poetry and *Harper's Magazine*, where three of these essays appeared, will be thrilled to have this warm, vivid celebration of New England rural life so beautifully preserved in its handsome slipcased edition. Illustrated throughout with woodcuts.

Illustrations by
Thomas W. Nason



TICKNOR & FIELDS
52 Vanderbilt Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MICHAEL GORRA

Personae

SOME MOMENTS IN WOODY ALLEN'S LATEST MOVIE are so appealingly funny that they remind you he began his career as a joke writer, whose work has until recently depended almost exclusively upon his gift as a creator of comic situations—the village idiot's convention in *Love and Death*, the lobsters in *Annie Hall*. Take, for instance, the bit in *Radio Days* where Mia Farrow as Sally the Cigarette Girl witnesses a mob rubout. Rocco the hitman turns toward her, raises his gun—and finds he's out of bullets. So he takes her hostage, which means bringing her home to Mama, where he can reload. On the way, Sally and Rocco discover that not only are they both from Brooklyn, but that they're both from Canarsie, indeed that they grew up around the corner from each other. Cut to Mama's apartment. Have some more pickled shrimp, she says to Sally, I remember you as a child. And Rocco, she calls over her shoulder, where are you going to dump the body?

But Sally survives, loses her Brooklyn accent, Eliza Doolittle fashion, and becomes an on-the-air gossip columnist, working out of the nightclub where she'd once sold cigarettes. We don't see any more of Rocco or Mama, who've been created for the sake of that schtick alone. And that makes me realize just how episodic most of Allen's work has been, one comic situation stitched to another, and another, the whole held together not by plot, or even by the film's general subject matter (Russian novels, science fiction, sex) but by Allen's own on-screen comic persona. Perhaps such episodic structures are characteristic of all screen comedy that's based upon a particular comedian's persona; certainly this would be true of Chaplin, of Fields, of Tati.

Allen has, of course, long chafed under what he has seen as that persona's limitations, been the professional funny man longing to be something more than funny—as the character he plays has told us in movie after movie. But that longing is itself so much a part of his self-deprecating performances that it's hard for an audience to take it as "seriously" as Allen must himself, and once such a persona has been as fully developed as his, it seems nearly impossible to enlarge and extend it as he has wanted to. Only Chaplin has done that, at the end of *City Lights*, and yet the pain he reveals there was always so implicit in the figure of the Tramp that one accepts it in a way that one cannot accept the yearnings of the stand-up comedian that Allen's persona remains. The one is serious, the other merely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wants to be taken seriously. On screen Allen's longings have had roughly the same relation to his comedy as Chaplin's cane did to the Tramp's loneliness and desperation; each is patently a defense, but against such very different things.

And even Chaplin had to abandon the Tramp before he could change directions with *Monsieur Verdoux*. Now *Radio Days* and its predecessors *Hannah and Her Sisters* and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* may provide a similar solution to Allen's dilemma. After I saw *Radio Days* I got out a videocassette of an Allen movie I'd not seen on its initial release, 1980's *Stardust Memories*. I'd been intrigued by some graceful allusions to Fellini in the new film, and wanted to match them against what I knew to be a whole movie based on him. But *Stardust Memories* is disappointingly pretentious in its attempt to transform Allen's situation into that of Fellini in *8 1/2*, so slavishly conscious of its model as to be entirely without the sense of creative joy and energy that characterizes the Fellini at even its most desperate moments. What struck me most about the movie, however, is how visually dull and lifeless it looks. Allen's camera is, in fact, the least interesting thing about his earlier movies, merely a recording device with which to capture the comic turns upon which they depend. So long as his material was fresh, one didn't notice; in *Stardust Memories*, where it isn't, one does. Such a camera is limited by its need to capture the stand-up flow of word and gesture which Allen's persona relies on, and in turn limits what he as a director can do. So long as he worked with it he could not take his movies past the schtick, the parody, the joke. Yet so long as he relied upon using himself on screen he could not employ the camera in any other way.

For a long time, then, Allen the director was, as Vincent Canby has argued, limited by Allen the performer. He is not now so committed to using himself on screen—did not appear at all in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, had no more claim on the audience's attention than any of the other characters in *Hannah*, and provides only voice-over narration in *Radio Days*, recalling the period in the thirties and forties that his title evokes. And in consequence Allen the director now stands clear of the performer, as the much larger, and indeed more serious, figure that he has long wanted to be. Yet he hasn't done this by making movies about the desire to be taken seriously. What he has done instead is discover a distinctive visual style.

I first became aware of that style in watching the street scenes in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. But the best example of it is the now famous restaurant scene in *Hannah*, the lunch between the three sisters, shot in the long takes on which Allen's style is now based, in which the camera circles the table at a slow and even speed that counterpoints the violence, the anger, with which the sisters interrupt and contradict what each other has to say. In *Radio Days* Allen puts that style to less searching but more loving use. Take a shot near the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beginning of the movie, for example, of a street dead-ending into Rockaway Beach, in which the camera slowly dollies back to show us two lines of dingy rowhouses framing a view of the sea, then reverses and continues to move down the street, away from the shore. And in doing so the shot delimits the world in which Allen's characters live, cramped, poor, bleak, and yet transfigured by the narrator's memory and the early morning light in which it's shot. In another the camera slides from the gaze of some teen-aged boys in a soda fountain to the row of wool-skirted girlish rumps parked on the counter stools that they're gazing at. Such long takes make Allen's camera at once leisurely and dynamic, where before it was static. I can't help but think that the change has something to do with the shift in the relative importance of his own role as an actor; and also with the move from Diane Keaton, whose manic energy was best served by a static camera, a still frame on which her motion could explode, to the relative serenity of Mia Farrow.

That style has made Allen capable of the sort of sustained storytelling his earlier movies notably lack. It will therefore sound paradoxical to say that *Radio Days* is, despite his new style, both the funniest and the most episodic of Allen's recent movies. But its comic situations don't depend on the particular repertoire of which his own screen persona is capable. Allen as actor continues to be funny, but within a set of now well-known boundaries. Allen the director can step through those boundaries. One way he does so is by making *Radio Days* more of an essay than a fiction film, a memoir held together by Allen's voice-over narration, whose form fits more comfortably than that of fiction around his fantastical digressions and comic sketches. Allen builds the movie around scenes of family life in Rockaway in which the radio figures. In one sequence, for example, the women in the house form a conga line and dance around the living room to the music the radio provides, trying to avoid the father—ingratiatingly played by Michael Tucker—who's chasing his son, the future narrator, with a belt. Then the music stops, a news bulletin flashes the story of a disaster that's struck a child halfway across the country, and Tucker's slap turns into a caress for the son who is safe at home. Allen then cuts to the scene of the disaster itself, and from there to a bar where people listen to the news in silence, then back to Rockaway, creating a sense of a whole nation pausing, listening in, pulled together, held together, by what at that moment does seem the miracle of radio.

But as this suggests, Allen often moves from the world of the listeners to that of the broadcasters, and even into the private lives of the radio stars. (That's how Sally comes in—she's having an affair with the star of a show the narrator's mother listens to.) I was particularly taken with the paradoxes Allen creates through the conjunction of film and radio, a dislocating visual presentation of an aural medium. He shows us a radio set fitted out with neon adver-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tisements for the benefit of a studio audience, but reminds us that the studio audience isn't the one for whom the show is really intended, and that these advertisements are not really seen but heard. Elsewhere he matches a sparsely furnished set against the way radio drama is perceived by its listeners, the sense of a world that a disembodied voice can create; an incongruity underlined by his choice of dumpy unglamorous Wallace Shawn to provide the voice of a figure known as The Masked Avenger.

Allen gives us Welles's *War of the Worlds*, quiz shows, gossip about Hollywood and Broadway stars, serials, and civil defense warnings. The last of those makes the future narrator imagine, in a Fellini-esque epiphany, that he sees a Nazi submarine come to the surface off Rockaway Beach. *Radio Days* is, in fact, a far more Fellini-esque movie than *Stardust Memories*, because in it Allen has found the part of his sensibility that does legitimately correspond to something in Fellini, his delight in popular culture and the rituals that surround it. Allen doesn't have the street festivals of Fellini's Rimini to rely on, and perhaps in consequence doesn't have the flamboyant sense of spectacle that is their corollary. What he does have are his memories of and love for the less organic but nevertheless extraordinary mass culture of New York at mid-century, for the Gershwin tunes, automats, movie palaces, and amusement parks whose depiction here makes *Radio Days* a smaller but still perfectly crafted *Amarcord*.

Allen has always been fascinated by the icons of popular culture (perhaps even more so now that he's become one himself), but while he has taken off Bogart beautifully I don't think he has ever done anything with Dietrich, the subject of Maximilian Schell's splendid film essay *Marlene*. Dietrich's screen persona is in fact a sort of female equivalent of Bogart's, marked by the same skin of cynicism over a sentimental core. The sacrifice she makes for Jimmy Stewart at the end of *Destry Rides Again* is a more fatal version of Bogart's at the end of *Casablanca*. The question behind Schell's movie is that of the degree to which Dietrich on-screen is the same as Dietrich off—but she has made it difficult for him and for us by refusing to let Schell film their forty hours of interviews.

What he has done instead is to make a movie about the difficulty of making a movie. He splices clips from Dietrich's films with shots of himself and his crew at work in the cutting room, trying to piece both this movie and its subject together—talking about her and the problems she gives them, building a replica of her apartment, working on a jigsaw puzzle of her face, watching several tailed and top-hatted imitators prance across the set, trying to figure out, as Schell himself says, "What is real." And all the while we hear Dietrich's voice, reminding Schell that she's only talking to him because she has signed a contract; describing herself as a "typical snotty Berliner"; saying "I thought Jannings was awful" in *The Blue Angel*; claiming that "I never ever took my career seriously." But that very re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fusal to do so is what, she claims, caught Josef von Sternberg's attention at her audition for *The Blue Angel*. She assumed she wouldn't get the part, and so didn't bother to try—and "that's what interested Sternberg, the fact that I wasn't interested."

Much of the fun of *Marlene* comes from listening to Dietrich being snotty in just this way, speaking contemptuously of the material with which she worked in a manner that seems entirely consistent with her screen persona. Still more of the movie's appeal lies in the sensual delight of watching her, as in the ravishing image Schell takes from *Dishonoured*, in which we see her looking through her veil, moist excitement across her face, at what we take to be the camera—but at what is also, we realize a second later, a firing squad. I don't find that delight in watching *The Blue Angel*, despite the sexual energy of her performance, for there her face and body seem unformed, still clothed in baby fat. But she lost a lot of weight when Sternberg brought her to America, and within a year had become the lean goddess we see in *Morocco*, in *Blonde Venus*, in *Dishonoured*, with a face whose bones are so beautifully defined they could be the lines in a cubist portrait. Paradoxically that face is the most extraordinary thing ever shot in soft-focus, for its angles are so cleanly etched that the camera does not make them dissolve, as it so often did to other faces in the thirties, but merely softens them into ethereality.

Dietrich claims—and how often one chooses that particular verb in quoting her—claims not only that she hates the kitsch that her movies with Sternberg epitomize, but that Germans as a nation do not suffer from kitschy or sentimental feelings. Then she suggests that while the material is kitschy, her performance of it is not, that in making *Dishonoured* she very carefully and professionally found out exactly how a body would fall after being shot by a firing squad. Dietrich is absorbed by questions of technique, of craft; watching a clip from *The Scarlet Empress* she wants Schell to note how, as she and her troops ride their horses into the Kremlin, the engineers managed to catch the sound of hoofbeats on the wooden stairs. But she doesn't have anything to say about her own performance. "What can I comment," she says, and at first one thinks that her refusal grows out of that contempt for her material. Then her words change. "Who am I to comment?" she asks, and wonders if Michelangelo would have had anything to say about the Sistine Chapel. And one realizes that her unwillingness grows from a belief that the woman in her eighties, talking to Schell in Paris, is quite separate from the great and beautiful art before her on the screen. And as she speaks Schell gives us the scene from that movie in which Dietrich as Catherine the Great rings a bell in the Kremlin—while the 1812 Overture plays in the background. And yet she hates kitsch.

But perhaps the great art on which she will not comment is not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that of her acting, or even of the movie itself, but simply the undeniable beauty of her exquisitely crafted physical presence. Watching this movie, these clips, hearing her speak, we never forget the question one of Schell's assistants asks at its start—"I wonder what she looks like now." Dietrich's refusal to show us would seem to have thrown a great obstacle in Schell's way. But there is more to *Marlene* than Dietrich herself, and that refusal has instead allowed Schell to make a far more memorable movie than he would have if his subject had been more cooperative. Her obstinacy takes away the givens, the conventions, of the documentary form on which Schell had thought to rely. It both allows and forces him to include the questions his crew asks about her, questions that make Schell's quest for a form coalesce with his quest for Dietrich's identity. When he tries to cajole her into watching her old films, she says "I'm not interested in the past, I'm much too practical a person," and refuses. When he brings a VCR to her apartment anyway, her agent slips him a note, with a quotation from Dante to the effect that there is no greater pain than the recollection of past happiness in times of misery—and in fact the clips he makes her watch, even that from *The Scarlet Empress*, so outrage her that she orders him to "go back to Mama Schell and learn some manners." Cut to a shot of marching movie cameras closing in on an old and frightened woman; cut to the Dietrich jigsaw puzzle Schell's staff has put together, which begins to twist, to crumble, to fall apart.

And yet that puzzle's outlines hold, both on screen and in our minds. The Dietrich Schell reveals is a more complex, smarter, more likeable woman than the one in the movies; less cynical, and more capable of sincerity. But she is recognizably the same person as the one we've known all along, marked by the same mixture of hardness and sentimentality one finds in her screen performances, and above all by the same flippancy. "Not interested," disengaged from the things around her—and interesting because of that, both to Sternberg in life and to us in art. Can one imagine a better description of Dietrich on screen than the one those two words provide? She did not become the roles she played so much as those roles became her. The same, perhaps, is true of Allen; all the more remarkable then, that as a director he has now escaped the limitations of his own persona.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WENDY LESSER

Serious Comedy

> The discovery that one has it in one's power to make someone else comic opens the way to an undreamt-of yield of comic pleasure and is the origin of a highly developed technique. One can make *oneself* comic, too, as easily as other people.
> —Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*

THE PREVALENT OPINION IS THAT TRAGIC ART is of a higher order than comic art—that comedy is childish or vulgar or stinkingly mortal, whereas tragedy is sublime, aristocratic, and even godlike. This is all very well. But there is one respect, at least, in which the comic view gives rise to more elevated feelings than the tragic. The man who describes his *own* life as tragic tends to come off as a self-pitying bore; the skillful, self-aware storyteller is more likely to present himself as being trapped in a comedy. When self-applied, tragedy reduces and comedy enlarges.

In terms of fictional literature, this means that comedy can be conveyed through a personal voice whereas tragedy must remain highly impersonal. The authors of the Book of Job, *King Lear*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Light in August* are so far away as to be virtually non-existent: they view their characters as if through a telescope, one that enlarges its subjects to astronomical proportions. In comedy, on the other hand, narrative voice is everything; the witty, engaging author is always refracting experience through his own (admittedly cracked) lens. (This is why Shakespeare's comedies are so disruptive and confusing. We can see the wink, but we can never see the eye behind the wink.)

Comedies do not necessarily make you laugh, and even when they do, the laugh may stick in your throat a bit. Among the great comedies of the last hundred years or so I would include Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Kafka's "The Judgment," and most of Chekhov. These works are hilariously sad.

It is probably no coincidence that my list is dominated by Russians. They also, as you will see, turn out to be the heroes of this review, accounting for the two best comedies of the five I discuss here. I can, if pushed, come up with possible causes: something innate in the self-mocking Russian character, the inflected nature of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the language (with its close attention to *who* is speaking to *whom* about *what*), the still-pervasive influence of the nineteenth-century masters, the comic possibilities inherent in large centralized governments (whether Tsarist or Soviet). Or, more likely, something else entirely. But I get ahead of myself. Let me start with the British.

For reasons totally beyond my comprehension, A.N. Wilson has managed to claw his way into the ranks of the great twentieth-century English comic writers. Reviews of his earlier novels (such as *Wise Virgins* and *Gentlemen in England*) abound with references to Evelyn Waugh, Barbara Pym, Kingsley Amis, Iris Murdoch, and so forth. But in place of their generous flexibility, their linguistic subtlety, and their deep sense of narrative wit, he offers us only rigid disapproval of contemporary manners. In a pursed-lipped, schoolmarmish fashion, he habitually trots out tales of sexual betrayal and mild social snobbery, only to end by bashing his characters over the head with ironic comeuppance. The plot of his latest novel, *Love Unknown*,[1] adheres so closely to this pattern that it's hardly worth describing in detail. Three uninteresting English girls—Monica, Belinda, and Richeldis—room together in their youth and then live out their intertwined fates. Belinda, the glamorous slut, marries and divorces repeatedly, with predictable and (it is implied) deserved unhappiness. Richeldis, the pretty innocent, has a storybook marriage which nearly disintegrates when Simon, her self-centered husband, falls madly in love with the chaste, intellectual Monica. All the characters are equally despicable (though Simon is perhaps a bit *more* equal). The novel contains an idiotic "Prehistory" chapter which, in addition to being badly written, is narratively unnecessary: we could easily pick up all the information it has to offer in later scenes. So its chief rationale must be to alert the reader, with bludgeon-like delicacy, to the novel's humorous intent. "Belinda, as we shall later call her (for our tale belongs to a period when Linda was as far forgotten as her mini-skirts and her black beehive), was the chief oo-er and aa-er in the matter of Richeldis," coos this sickeningly arch narrator on the first page. Wilson's tone here bears the same resemblance to true comic voice as trowelled-on pancake makeup does to a fine English complexion.

By comparison, our homegrown John Updike makes a more-than-respectable showing. *Trust Me*,[2] his thirtieth book, consists of twenty-two short stories, many of them previously published in *The New Yorker*. Updike has both the virtues and the flaws of his primary periodical home: he writes like an angel, but sometimes it is an angel who doesn't have much to say, and always it is an angel who prefers not to delve too deeply into what lies beneath visible

[1] LOVE UNKNOWN, by *A.N. Wilson*. Viking. $16.95.
[2] TRUST ME, by *John Updike*. Alfred A. Knopf. $17.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

experience. (For that, perhaps, one needs to write like the devil, as Dostoyevsky and Kafka do.) Updike's stories are often more poignant, less wildly comic, than his novels; they also tend to be less repellent, and the best ones (like "The City" and "The Lovely Troubled Daughters of Our Old Crowd" in this collection) leave an eerie sense of things not known to the author, of ordinary mysteries that lie too deep for beautifully chosen words. At these moments, Updike resembles good Cheever. And his sentences are like no one else's: at times they almost seem to suggest that the English language was evolved expressly for their creation. We notice this particularly in a short story, where the whole movement of the work can be brought to bear on a few phrases. For instance, in "The City" Updike has his traveler-protagonist notice about the stewardess, as his plane begins to descend for a landing: "Unusually for these days, she was young and pretty. So many stewardesses seemed, like Carson himself, on second careers, victims of middle-aged restlessness—the children grown, the long descent begun." Elsewhere Updike is highly attuned to the subtleties of sensation, commenting about a character who has just accomplished a parlor trick: "In the aftermath of his exertion the roomful of people lurches slightly, like the first hesitant movement of a carrousel when all the rides are sold." And of course there is always his inimitable visual acuity, his capacity for perfect description: "The car was a Japanese model, as cunning and tawdry as a music box. It had four forward gears and a reverse tucked somewhere in the lower right quadrant, where New Zealand is on a map. . . ."

The problem with Updike is that one finally cannot, as the title story requests, trust him. He sees things with too self-serving an eye. A certain amount of distortion, of course, is essential to the comic writer's art, but it works best when the comedian acknowledges his own biases, makes himself a victim of the distorting lens as well. Updike's art is too apparently objective to manage this: the bias creeps in fitfully, sneakily, through the back door. It comes especially, I find, in his treatment of ex-wives. The male character in these stories merely "has" a girlfriend, but the ex-wife "had acquired a boyfriend" (as he says in "Still of Some Use," where the narrator calls the lunkish boyfriend "Ted" while the ex-couple is "Foster" and "Mrs. Foster"). The new wife may be merely a prettier, younger, sexier version of the old one, but the new "boyfriend" (no one ever used the word with more sarcastic bite than Updike) is always a caricature—a hulking ex-athlete, a man of no evident intellectual appeal, a boring accountant or salesman. Even when he attempts to tell a story from the wife's point of view, Updike cannot sufficiently abandon the husband—which is why "The Killing" (the story of a woman who spends the night with her ex-husband after her father dies) is both the bravest and the cruelest tale in the book.

Though authorial bias is also a problem for Saul Bellow, purport-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed objectivity is not: his fiction makes no pretense to being even-handed, but sides openly with certain characters against others. As a result, his comedy is, in general, both funnier and more serious than Updike's. *More Die of Heartbreak*[3] is Bellow's best book since *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, perhaps his most amusing since *Henderson the Rain King*. It is not that Bellow is any kinder to ex-wives—or wives, or girlfriends—than Updike is; on the contrary, his women are viragos where Updike's are mere shrews. But *More Die of Heartbreak* espouses its prickly opinions, marries them openly and in full sight of the Lord: they are the lifeblood of this novel, and of its narrator, Kenneth Trachtenberg. In describing the adventures of his beloved Uncle Benn—his enthusiasms and achievements in the field of botany, his naivety in the world of business and politics, his disastrous marital alliance to the grasping Matilda Layamon and her even more grasping father—Kenneth also presents himself: his own failed loves and successful studies, his own familial affections and deep-seated dislikes. Kenneth consists almost entirely of voice and attitude, as you can tell from this passage chosen virtually at random:

> Above all, however, I hated for Uncle to let himself be used against Harold Vilitzer. Vilitzer beyond a doubt was a powerful operator. His main objective was to pile up a huge personal fortune, and the hell with everything else. Personally I had nothing against him, but if the logic of acquisition dictated that he should be brought down by it too, then let it happen. It makes perfectly good sense that those who take the sword should die by it. Ditto, those who take the penis or whatever else.

The pleasure of this passage, and indeed of the whole novel, comes from the curious mixture of tones—Yiddish with American, apparently logical with wackily dismissive, educated with idiomatic, warm with cool. It is no coincidence that "personal" and "personally" ring strongly in this speech, for the individual sensibility is the core of Bellow's fiction. If Bellow has a literary ancestor, it is, strangely enough, Proust: plot and even character matter almost not at all in comparison to the refractory vision of the obsessive narrator.

Professor Kenneth Trachtenberg's field of study is things Russian, and the novel abounds with references to Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and other Russian masters. This is ironic, for precisely what Bellow fails to achieve here—and what makes his novel fall short of greatness—is that curious strain of highly personal impersonality which characterizes the obsessive Russian narrator. It is a voice which at once praises and diminishes itself—which gathers the entire world

[3] MORE DIE OF HEARTBREAK, by *Saul Bellow*. William Morrow & Company. $17.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around itself, floods all else with its own concerns, and then dismisses those concerns as trivial. Yet that dismissal too must be discounted, for we know that the one thing we can trust in this narrator is his ability to distort, to fantasize, to create something out of nothing or nothing out of something.

This spiteful, weak, intelligent, paranoid, proud, amusing character made an early appearance in Gogol's stories and in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*; he took a new form in Chekhov's plays and stories; and he has reappeared, in the twentieth century, in the work of Abram Tertz and Vladimir Voinovich. Other than the fact that they have both been exiled from Russia, and that they have jointly inherited this remarkable tradition of storytelling, Tertz and Voinovich have little in common; but they are both first-rate writers of serious comedy. Part of what makes them so good is that they understand, as Freud put it, how "one can make *oneself* comic, too, as easily as other people."

Abram Tertz (the pen name of Andrei Sinyavsky) is the author of a famous essay called "On Socialist Realism," part of which has been included as the preface of the new paperback edition of his *Fantastic Stories*.[4] "Right now I put my hope in a phantasmagoric art," Tertz says, "with hypotheses instead of a Purpose, an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life." The product of this theory is these six wonderful stories, a disturbing, entrancing mixture of Kafka, Dostoyevksy, and Gogol (with perhaps a little Borges thrown in as well—though Borges is too cheerfully impersonal, too uninterested in suffering, to join this crowd). This new edition contains, for the first time in English, an odd little story called "Pkhentz," in which the standard pathetic-outcast narrator—a hunchback and a paranoid—turns out to be an alien creature exiled from a faraway planet. Meeting another hunchback whom he takes to be a fellow alien, he comments: "I was delighted with this skillful caricature of humanity, this art which was all the more natural because it was so absurd, and I realized rather sadly that he was my superior at the game of living, that I lacked his ability to enter into the only form of being possible for us on earth . . . that of hunchbacked monsters and injured egotists." One hears in this, I think, a hint of authorial self-commentary—a sense that Tertz, like Kafka in "The Burrow," views the writer himself as a strange, alien creature failing to make a go of this life to which he is inherently unsuited.

The two best stories in *Fantastic Stories* are "The Icicle" and "Graphomaniacs." The latter explores the vicissitudes in the life of an unpleasant, self-indulgent, seemingly rotten but perhaps ultimately talented writer (in that he turns out to be the author of this compellingly absurd story). The former deals with a man who suddenly discovers that he can read the past and the future—not only

[4] FANTASTIC STORIES, by *Abram Tertz*. Trans. by *Richard Lourie*. Northwestern University Press. $12.95p.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his own, but that of everyone he meets, and even his own previous and future incarnations. He tries to avert the disaster that will kill his beloved, but he fails in this. So he sets out to write a book (this very story, we infer) which will instruct his future self to marry *her* future self, in whatever form they take. This device lends a marvelous resonance to the idea that the author who writes for himself alone also writes for all humanity, as the narrator realizes: he points out that he is writing "not for myself as I am now, but for myself as I shall be at some time in the future. Which means that anybody else—readers in the here and now—can easily join me if they wish. Because nobody knows who was who or who will be who. Perhaps you—yes, you—are me."

Interestingly enough, the premises of Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042*[5] are quite similar to those of the two Tertz stories: the book we hold in our hands is the product of the scribbling narrator, who has undertaken some form of time travel to bring it to us. But if the tone of Tertz's work is frankly fantastic, that of Voinovich's is straightforwardly satiric. His is not a fluctuating fictional voice, entering in and out of various characters. Voinovich's strength as an author (his political strength, I might add, as well as his aesthetic strength) lies in the fact that he can *only* be himself. The narrator of this book, though he has a different name, is recognizably that of Voinovich's *The Ivankiad*, a hilarious epic about the search for a Moscow apartment (written and published while Voinovich still lived in Russia). The point of Voinovich's writing, as of his life, is that he can't change his style to suit anybody—neither the censors, nor the critics, nor the setting in which he lives, nor even the demands made on him by fictional characters *within* his novels. His narrative voice is himself: loud, audacious, wisecracking, trouble-making, enormously courageous, and, finally, gigantically good-humored.

Moscow 2042 begins in 1982, when our narrator, Vitaly Nikitich Kartsev, is sitting in a West German beer garden talking to a German friend. (Voinovich himself now lives in Stockdorf). He discovers that time travel is already available (though only to the very wealthy), and by various hooks and crooks manages to book himself a flight that arrives in Moscow in 2042. Before embarking, he is summarily called to the Canadian estate of the messianic Russian writer Sim Simych Karnavalov (a character highly reminiscent of Solzhenitsyn), who pompously gives him a mission for the future. That Russian future, Kartsev discovers, is even more distressingly restrictive than the present, but it is a future in which Karnavalov's name is unrecognized and Kartsev himself has an enormous reputation, based largely on his prophetic book *Moscow 2042*—a book he does not remember writing, because it came out in 1987, five years

[5] MOSCOW 2042, by *Vladimir Voinovich*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $16.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

after he left for the future. These tangles would be the opportunity for a science fiction writer to begin commenting on the nature of time, and for a deconstructionist to pontificate on the non-existence of the original written word, but for Voinovich they merely become the occasion for a typically comic address to his readers: "They said that writers shouldn't explain everything, shouldn't spell everything out for the reader. The writer should allow the reader to do a little work, expend a little effort of his own and find things that the writer himself had failed to see. If that's the case, then you figure out how it came to be that I read my own book before I had written it. Yes, go ahead if you want and think it all through. As for me, the whole business has my head reeling. . . ."

Like his author, Kartsev turns out to be the kind of guy who can't alter a word of his writing to suit the political circumstances. The powers-that-be of the future want him to delete Sim Simych from the book because they fear a "Simite" uprising; Kartsev, though he finds Karnavalov enormously irritating and wrongheaded, can't do it. (For Voinovich, part of the issue—especially now that he lives outside Russia—is to define himself as critical of the Soviet Union *without* thereby being classed with the right-wing Solzhenitsyn; this satire enables him to claim that middle ground.) Naturally this dilemma creates the opportunity for Voinovich to make humorous but nonetheless extremely serious remarks about the relationship between fiction and reality, the degree of control an author has over his creations, and so on. I won't give away the ending of the book, but the plot itself is secondary. What makes *Moscow 2042* so satisfying is the warmth and affection with which Voinovich attacks his satiric objects: love and concern are deeply mingled with his distress about the problems of his socialist country (which is partly what distinguishes him from Solzhenitsyn, who seems unable to feel this love for anything in present-day Russia). As Kartsev says at the beginning of the book: "It should be pointed out that nothing could be more boring than to argue with Westerners. When a Western person sees that someone feels strongly about some point of view, that it is very important to him, he's ready to agree with it on the spot, which is not at all the case with Russians." Despite the seriousness of its concerns—or, as Voinovich suggests, precisely because of it—this novel takes the form of a joyful, invigorating argument with the very people who expelled its author from Russia. Like Tertz, Voinovich uses his fiction to answer the charges that, in real life, have been leveled against him as a writer.

It is the great virtue of contemporary Russian writing—*some* contemporary Russian writing, I should say—that it can directly address the topic of the writer without seeming either self-indulgent or beside the point. When American writers make authorship their subject, they tend to sound boringly experimental or effetely academic. But out of the same material, Russians like Tertz and Voino-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vich can create a whole fabric of social commentary and self-mocking personal analysis. Perhaps Soviet censorship enhances this ability by strengthening the extent to which writing, the mere act of authorship, is indeed a significant social and political act. But to believe that totally is to rob these writers of their central point, which is that writing is finally a personal gesture, motivated by the selfish purposes of a specific individual with a distinct, necessarily flawed personality. The voice of that individual—that cracked, wheezing, demanding, self-justifying, self-lacerating voice—is what propels the fiction and makes it great comedy. And if the author, in putting himself under the microscope's lens, manages to dissect the rest of his society as well—so much the better.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TOM WILHELMUS

Nothing Pretentious about Life and Art

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
—W. B. Yeats

In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Yeats turns his difficulty in finding a suitable theme to write about into an occasion for a late (some say spurious) concession to the priority of life over art. Faced with a similar dilemma—how to write a review of six books which seem to have almost nothing in common—I worried about finding anything to connect them.

One possibility might be to talk about how most of the authors are prize winners. Last year Nadine Gordimer received this magazine's Bennett Award. Three others—Yasunari Kawabata, Heinrich Böll, and William Golding—have received the Nobel Prize. And another, William McPherson, is a past recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, though not for fiction. Beyond that nominal similarity, however, only a few accidental parings seem possible. Two of the books are by Americans. Two more are about the aftermath of World War II. Two are set in the nineteenth century. And if you stretch a point, two are novels about the sea.

If I had more space, I thought about arguing one of my favorite convictions: that diversity itself is important; that content and story deserve more attention than we currently give them; that for too long we have been retreating (as John Fowles put it) "from content into form, from meaning into appearance, from ethics into aesthetics." On the other hand, some of these books cry out for formalist consideration.

Plagued by contradictions, only the most general solutions seemed possible. So, with apologies to Yeats, I have decided that I too must "lie down where all the ladders start" and that I will borrow his theme—life, and the difficulty of turning it into art—though even to me that decision sounds pretentious.

From the outset, for instance, the "art" in *A Sport of Nature*[1] appears deeply compromised by the "life" it attempts to describe. In

[1] A SPORT OF NATURE, by *Nadine Gordimer*. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

South Africa life is evil, and a case may be made that conventional novels only nourish that evil. Therefore, although *A Sport of Nature* begins as a rather subtle portrait of a rebellious white girl—abandoned by her parents and raised by two maternal aunts—it later abandons complex characterization and is drawn toward fable: the heroine Hillela (later known simply as "the white woman"), leaves her home in South Africa, lives abroad in the community of exiled revolutionaries, works for a French ambassador, marries one black revolutionary who is assassinated (by whom she has had a daughter), lives subsequently in Eastern Europe and then in the United States raising money for the cause, and marries another black president of a central African nation. As the novel ends, she stands alongside her husband at a ceremony commemorating the establishment of a new black-governed nation in South Africa.

Initially, the picture of Hillela's development is fairly complete. Her aunts are thoroughly convincing—though representative—portraits of a bourgeois housewife and a committed reformer. Neither can, however, understand her niece or prevent her from leaving home for reasons that seem thematically logical—sexual liberation and indifference to the color barrier. After Hillela does leave home, however, Gordimer drops any notion of a complex psychological portrait, and, on page 100, simply announces that hereafter Hilly "passes into a half-presence" because there is "a lack of objective evidence" and "documentation" to explain her life.

Perhaps we are not surprised by the sudden authorial intrusion since such devices are commonplace in contemporary fiction. What is surprising is the decision to tell us less and not more about Hillela. From this point forward, we are led to believe that no one *genre* and no one voice—not even her own—can clearly describe her nature. The woman becomes a puzzle to her now-distant family, her lovers and the anonymous historical and journalistic voices set to examine her case. Eventually, when her husband is assassinated, she apparently feels she must relinquish any claims to her own individuality in order to become merely a functionary in the revolutionary cause.

In one sense, this self-destruction is heroic and may even justify the increasing poverty of information about her, for as the narrator observes, "In the lives of the greatest, there are such lacunae—Christ and Shakespeare disappear from and then reappear in the chronicles that documentation and human memory provide." My sense, however, is that Gordimer is deeply ambivalent about the loss of personality that turns a human being into an abstraction.

From the perspective of history the loss of Hillela as an individual may be necessary to create a new political species. This is also the point of the title, drawn by Gordimer from biological science since, as Lewis Thomas has said, to our own DNA we may only represent a convenient means of locomotion. For the species to evolve, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

individual organism may need to be sacrificed, a conception I find persuasive and full of the integrity with which Gordimer, a great novelist, approaches her work. As an essay on the effect of history upon the individual the book seems entirely convincing. Others will complain that it is not a novel and does not produce the same satisfactions that a novel provides. And they will be right. The author herself would lament the fact that the evil in South Africa affords no more pleasing expression.

If one solution to the problem of mixing life and art is to show how the former may compromise the latter, another solution is to submerge life into the demands created by art. At any rate that is the course that Yasunari Kawabata appears to have taken in *The Old Capital*,[2] recently translated into English for the first time.

In some senses reading Kawabata is like reading Jane Austen. Both artists prefer an art of minute effects and subtle appearances. Both depict a world that is orderly, traditional, decorous, and circumscribed by precise social rituals. If Elizabeth Bennet can take pleasure in the tasteful appointments of Darcy's estate at Rosings and read the man's character in the furnishings of his household, Kawabata can extend this principle to include a whole city. It would, in fact, be an error to say that Kyoto is a setting in his novel; instead, at times the characters are only an occasion for the city—its temples, vistas, seasonal ceremonies and rituals—to act through them.

Austen's novels were contemporary with the Napoleonic Wars with France. Kawabata wrote in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In some senses each author's orderliness is an attempt to overcome disorder in the surrounding environment caused by recent history. As with all his novels of the period, Kawabata meant *The Old Capital* to be an elegy to Japan's defeat and an effort to counteract ensuing Westernization. These are principles he shared with another famous Japanese novelist, Mishima; and, therefore, it may only be moderately surprising that Kawabata—who won the Nobel Prize in 1968—committed suicide in 1972.

But it is also this degree of seriousness which puzzles Western readers. What saves Jane Austen is her ironic detachment, the amused sense of social comedy, that adds "sense" to her observations on "sensibility." By contrast, the work of most Japanese seems homiletic and admonitory. Therefore, it's additionally surprising to read in the translator's introduction that some of Kawabata's techniques were considered "avante-garde and even shocking to Japanese readers." For, unless the translator himself has done his job poorly, little that is shocking really surfaces. Only the author's decision not to state the story's final resolution—although the resolution

[2] THE OLD CAPITAL, by *Yasunari Kawabata*. Trans. by *J. Martin Holman*. North Point Press. $15.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is clearly implied—keeps the outcome from being utterly predictable.

As with setting, the events in the life of the novel's heroine, Chieko, the adopted daughter of a kimono designer, seem completely shaped by ritual and design. When Chieko wonders on the first page whether two patches of violets growing on a tree in her garden will ever "meet and know one another," readers might guess that the plot has been fully predicted. Despite her parents' claim that they had kidnapped her as a child, Chieko will meet and know her long-lost twin. Moreover, the discovery will occur because one of Chieko's two possible suitors—the one she is not apparently drawn to—will not be able to tell the two girls apart. As a consequence, he seems likely to marry the twin, leaving Chieko with her other, truer boyfriend. Other, similar patterns emerge from comparisons of life to a well-tended garden and to a traditional cycle of rituals or seasons. Similar discussions about kimono design, and the need for the designer both to maintain tradition and to accommodate change merely reinforce the impression that Kawabata's novel is not really intended to represent life except didactically in terms of how it should be lived, how parents should be honored, how change must be accommodated without destroying the traditional core of cultural values. The subtlety with which such an approach can be pursued can be charming and one I think most Americans can appreciate but not entertain seriously.

The Casualty,[3] a collection of early stories by another Nobel Prize winner, Heinrich Böll, contrasts starkly with *The Old Capital* in its attempt to deal with the aftermath of World War II. It also contains a more familiar solution to the writer's artistic problems. Böll, well known to American audiences, resembles Hemingway in his blunt, uncompromising portrayal of the brutality of war, its occasional absurdity, its desperate humor, and its dehumanizing effects.

These brilliant sketches, written between 1946 and 1952 (when Böll was between the ages of 29 and 35), clearly predict the successful career to follow. In conception as well as execution they are journeyman pieces intended to establish the writer's credentials: his social consciousness and serious demeanor, his right to be considered in the same company as Brecht and Kafka, and—as a former soldier—his right to speak with bitter irony. Missing as yet is the more refined social comedy and thoughtful observation that will later shape stories like "Christmas Every Day" and novels like *Group Portrait With Lady*.

The collection divides into roughly two equal halves, one describing experiences of everyday soldiers leading up to the surrender, the other describing the depressing conditions of the immediate

[3] THE CASUALTY, by *Heinrich Böll*. Trans. by *Leila Vennewitz*. Farrar Straus & Giroux. $16.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

postwar period. Apart from the title story, I prefer the later tales. For one thing, there is a depressing similarity in the stories that writers of any nationality tell about combat: the soldier who ironically lives when his comrade dies; the private who shoots his inhumane officer out of boredom, bitterness, or despair; the wounded man who searches for the nurse whom he has once kissed. All these clichés and others may of course truly reflect the actual nature of war, but if so, their repeatability is ample reminder that war is no longer glorious (if it ever was) and we would prefer to avoid it.

Therefore, stories like "Beside the River," about a young man who has lost his family's ration stamps and who is saved from suicide by an American, command more interest because they present a less familiar side of postwar experience and because of the precise way in which Böll captures the mannerisms of the American's speech. Even briefer sketches, like "The Rain Gutter" and "Autumn Loneliness," are more like Picasso drawings, elegant and eloquent despite their being about brutal circumstances. Some stories are surrealistic—like "The Waiting Room" with its heavily laden title, about a man who trades his hat for bread. Others are comic or even make a brush with metafiction, like "An Optimistic Story." All of them are startlingly fresh and memorable.

Nonetheless, the centerpiece is "The Casualty" itself. Occupying forty-five of the whole book's 181 pages of text, it traces the experiences of a young casualty as he travels from the front to an uneasy peace in the rear—a plot that provides a suitable metaphor for the whole book. My sense is that "The Casualty" will be read on many levels as a statement of what book jackets like to call "the spiritual condition of mankind in the twentieth century." In this case, such a statement might even be true.

One example of the "literary" approach to life and art is revealed stylistically in the work of William McPherson whose new novel, *To the Sargasso Sea*,[4] could almost be described entirely through the allusions it makes to other literary works.

The final chapter alone warrants comparison with a variety of stories and novels about a man struggling to overcome his own self-destructive impulses. A number of works leap to mind (*Under the Volcano*, "The Secret Sharer"), but because the man is a writer and a latent (later blatant) homosexual, the most obvious parallel is with Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*.

What I really have in mind, however, is the manner—also in the last chapter—in which the literary allusions the characters make provide a subtext to the story, allusions like those to lesbian poet Adrienne Rich, to Tiresias the prophet from Greek myth who had been both a man and a woman, and to the threatening consequences of sex in Yeats's "Leda and the Swan." Even Shakespeare

[4] TO THE SARGASSO SEA, by *William McPherson*. Simon & Schuster. $18.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

makes a brief appearance in a comment about how reports about Bermuda, the setting for this last chapter, influenced *The Tempest*. All these allusions contribute to a sense of the hidden life in general and its shaping power on the imagination. They complement other, resonant references to swimming, diving to unknown depths and encountering a lurking monster (in this case a shark) that give this chapter its remarkable, though somewhat nervous, dramatic tension. Perhaps the best device in this respect is the one contained in the title itself—that of the clutching sargassum that entraps the unwary traveler and will not let him escape (somehow, however, in this instance McPherson missed a very apt allusion to Pound's "Portrait d'une Femme"). This chapter alone is 150 pages long and could stand successfully on its own as a novella.

All the more unfortunate, then, that the first two-thirds of *To the Sargasso Sea* are so weak. Full of casual sex, sentimental maundering about family and caste, played out in sumptuous London and New York settings, paying its respects to art in a manner that by comparison seems crude and cynical. When we are first introduced to the hero, Andrew McCallister, an aspiring and even moderately successful playwright—who nonetheless doesn't exhibit any of the understanding you might expect from a person in his profession—he seems like a character in a drugstore novel. We pointedly do not see him at work, only at lunch or at parties or having sex. When he has sex, say, with Daisy Curtis, the older girl he'd always admired when they were children in Grand Riviere, it is apt to be on the floor of the library in the Huntingtons' sumptuous London home, where he may open his eyes, "to see a tiny section of carpet, a fragment of an exquisite Persian garden wound with lacy tendrils and flowers of the finest muted hues."

Such writing, which lingers over appearances, is for a different audience than the one that might find the final chapter appealing. In this context, the stream of literary allusions, which later will have some point, merely add to the decor. Even the poignancy we are supposed to feel in the McCallisters' family life—for instance in the long serial bedtime story McCallister tells his daughter—seems self-indulgent. Similarly, the sex is gratuitously violent and some of the motivations (like McCallister's agonizing over his other hidden vice, smoking) simply unaccomplished.

My impression is that the last chapter of *To the Sargasso Sea* was written before the earlier portion of the novel and warrants some of the acclaim that attended the author's first novel, *Testing the Current*, published in 1984. It does not escape some uncomplimentary comparisons (to "Miami Vice" for example), but it does have more than one surface and hints at depths that are missing earlier in the novel. Moreover, it proves that literariness does not have to be derivative.

The "life unseen" is also the subject of Nobel Laureate William

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Golding's new novel, *Close Quarters*.[5] And in a more dramatic fashion, the climax of his novel depends on a submerged daemonic presence that erupts into chilling visibility when we least expect it. To the young protagonist it is a vision "wholly awesome and dreadful" as if from a nightmare, something "like the crown of a head pushing upward" through the seaweed in which the vessel he is traveling in is entrapped.

The second volume in a trilogy which began with the *Rites of Passage*, published in 1980, *Close Quarters* is the work of a master storyteller who is not afraid to give a young, callow, and insufferable English aristocrat, Edmund Fitzhenry Talbot, the role of narrator. Set in 1814, it is the continuation of a story about an unnamed ship wallowing toward Australia where Talbot hopes to secure his fortune.

Although his role in the first volume was apparently slight, by the end of this one it is beginning to appear that Talbot himself will be the object of the passage of which this narrative is a "rite." Still at first the journal he is keeping wanders about nearly as aimlessly as the ship itself. Near the beginning of his account, he reports that the ship has been seriously damaged and for this reason is traveling sluggishly. The somber realization that the ship might founder, however, is deferred for Talbot by the arrival of another vessel, also becalmed, which transports a young lady with whom he immediately falls in love. Only after his inamorata has been wafted away (while he is unconscious) by a momentarily freshening wind does Talbot begin to sense more fully the vessel's worsening condition. Finally he does begin to glimpse a world beneath the one to which he has been educated, a world "as strange and perhaps . . . as awesome as the wooden monster" he had seen dredged up from the deep.

These are the modest rewards of a book that suffers however from being, like the ship, in transit and whose prose is afflicted with the same narrative improbabilities as those contained in period accounts of similar voyages. Other features lack the depth they will gain when the final volume appears and the rich allegory, now hidden, which is the novel's real justification can itself rise to the surface.

Finally, we might object that "life" has no substance apart from the ways in which it may be construed as "art." Along with La Rochefoucauld, we might argue that we would not know what life (he said "love") is unless we had first read about it in books.

For example, David R. Slavitt's excellent, little novel, *The Hussar*[6]

[5] CLOSE QUARTERS, by *William Golding*. Farrar Straus & Giroux. $16.95.
[6] THE HUSSAR, by *David R. Slavitt*. Louisiana State University Press. $16.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is a rendering of Theodor Fontane's 1880s novel, *A Man of Honor*, from a description Slavitt found in the *New York Review* of October 2, 1982. Despite the odor of preciosity and bookishness we sometimes associate with historical novels (Slavitt himself calls *The Hussar* a "literary parlor game"), this one strikes me as successful not only because he is stylistically accurate to the type of romantic fiction he is imitating but also because he is able to suggest how the type "lives" in us today.

Set in the small village of Waldenburg in Austria-Hungary in the 1860s, just prior to the Seven Weeks' War, the novel tells the story of a *ménage à trois* among a naive young officer and the mother and daughter with whom he is billeted and follows his experiences as the affair succeeds in ways he had never anticipated. After a brief period of pleasure, however, he commits suicide after he feels his honor has been compromised.

The plot to such a story is slight and traditional, and readers don't approach it innocently. Either as a result of watching movies starring Victor Mature, from reading popular romances, or more properly from reading Pushkin, Lermontov, or *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, any reader might say like the narrator, "I realized there was something in this configuration that spoke to me with a siren's voice, some alluring message" that he had already learned.

Probably *The Hussar* is not even as accurate to type as we might suspect, but sensitive readers will find the intellectual adventure appealing. For as Borges suggested in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," even if a work from the past was to be reproduced word for word in the present century, its meaning would change as soon as it was "lived" in the mind of a twentieth-century reader. For myself, I am struck that the ladies who seduce the young man are liberated (one by experience, the other by having read George Sand); that the novel is framed by having two narrators (Kraus and a regimental batman, whose democratic viewpoint is its own comment on the fate of the officer class); and that the whole second half of the novel can be read as a philosophical allegory on the fate of twentieth-century as well as nineteenth-century man.

To put it that way strikes even me as over generalized. But I didn't ask for this theme, I found it. Slavitt's novel does say something significant about art and life but does so clearly and simply and contains nothing pretentious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT McDOWELL

Collisions in Poetry

AS EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW, W. D. Snodgrass won the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for *Heart's Needle*, his first collection. Since then, he has published seven volumes of poetry, many in hard-to-find limited editions. Now, with Soho Press's release of his *Selected Poems 1957–1987*,[1] we have our first opportunity to see Snodgrass in perspective, and the vision is impressive. Though I do not much care for the label and will make little of it in these comments, it must be said that Snodgrass founded the Confessional School in poetry. Later, Lowell, Plath, and Sexton would be grouped with Snodgrass and eclipse him in celebrity. This is odd and so American, for it is clear that he has more depth and style than any of them.

In an era that prizes varieties of counterfeit style rather than substance and the style it generates, Snodgrass provides a valuable example of dissent. When he writes unerringly of the cruelty of children, the guilt of parents, and the trials of lovers, he is never self-serving or sentimental. This alone sets him apart from his late confessional peers. His grasp of history distinguishes him as well. Whereas in Lowell historical awareness is manipulated only to bolster a defective personality, in Snodgrass it contributes to the creation of a community world view. "We must live with intent," the poet tells us. In these poems the "I" is not *I*, but all of us. Snodgrass insists that we accept responsibility not only for our lives but our social inventions, too. In short, Snodgrass' poetry embodies belief in a social contract much larger than the popular contract that confines itself to the petty kingdom of the Self.

> Your credit has finally run out.
> On our steel table, trussed and carved,
> You'll find this world's hardworking, starved
> Teeth working in your precious skin.
> The earth turns, in the end, by turn about
> And opens to take you in.
>
> "A Flat One"

If this book confirms the poet's long human reach, it also showcases his polished versatility. The casual reader familiar only with Snodgrass' purposeful bitterness in an early poem like "Fourth of

[1] SELECTED POEMS 1957–1987, by *W.D. Snodgrass*. Soho Press. $19.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

July" may be surprised to discover here the lovely observations of nature from *If Birds Build with Your Hair* (1979), the slashing humor of *Kinder Capers* (1986), and the witty, disturbing poem for children of all ages, *The Boy Made of Meat* (1982).

Readers of this book, which also outdistances the others discussed here in design, will discover poem after poem with integrity's weight in them. We do not much associate integrity with poetry anymore. But I must use the word here. Like Yeats, Snodgrass writes a formal poetry of aggression that challenges our smug conventions and asks us to be wiser, more humane. "The burning witness of his senses" seems true.

Another selected, *New and Selected Poems* by Marvin Bell,[2] comes out in the poet's fiftieth year combining poems from eight earlier collections with a closing section of new work. If we accept this book as the definitive Bell to date, it is distressing to realize that he has labored so long yet failed to develop a style all his own.

He has tried. He has worked in short lines and stretched lines in recent poems clear across the page. He has enthusiastically hugged the popular mannerisms of his era and employed them over and over. It follows, having said this, that the Self is Bell's only subject. When trees and other natural objects are addressed, described, or speak for themselves, the poet means only to compare them to and celebrate himself. Even when Bell departs momentarily from his favored domestic woe to write about writing, he is writing about himself. But by his own words shall we know him. In one poem he writes "I take a lot for granted" and elsewhere, speaking in the guise of a tree, "To be a man is to be a sentimentalist, soft inside."

Apparently, Bell's sentimentality is incurable. As sentimentality always does, it infects poems here with inaccuracy and posturing. For example, in "A Biography" Bell writes "Women he loved he surrendered, / as leaf falls for the love of leaf." What does the second line *mean*? Does anyone really believe that a leaf falls because it loves another leaf? And we can substitute any noun for *leaf* and realize the same effect. Or consider these lines from "Residue of Song":

> You brought her your past; she wept.
> She brought you her future; you mislaid it,
> Later you squeezed until it uttered, *piano* . . .

Piano? What is missing here? The connections that create meaning have been ignored. Instead, the poet relies on echoes of weighty words like *past*, *future*, and *she wept*. The echoes, however, are called up, if at all, from the reader's experience. They do not really reside in the poem, as they do, for example, in the best work of James

[2] NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Marvin Bell*. Atheneum. $21.00; $8.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wright or Bill Knott. In the work of these poets, disparate images are yoked together to illuminate meaning. In Bell's poetry, the poet reneges on the subtle contract between writer and reader. One other prize example of sentimentality can be found in "To Dorothy." Meditating on the prospect of losing a loved one, the poet says that he would "have to ask the grass to let me sleep." This isn't Just Plain Folks poetry, it's just plain silly.

In an effort to enliven such paucity of expression, Bell has relied heavily over the years on repetition and wrenched and inverted syntax. Unfortunately, the efforts read like exercises. In "The Einstein Poems" he writes "You would love your neighbor / if he would help you help it help him." In "Give Back, Give Back" we come upon "I gave up pleasure, / for pleasure, in pleasure, to pleasure." These are not ironic treasures. One wonders if the poet hopes to substitute the appearance of complex thought where no thought exists. In a more recent poem we meet the self-conscious device of direct address. Here the poet steps out of the poem to patronize the audience, usually with the expression, "Dear Reader."

Given the prevalence of these devices, it is inevitable to make comparisons between Bell and Jorie Graham, one of his better former students and currently his colleague at the University of Iowa. As I shall discuss Graham's new book later in this chronicle, I will only offer here that it is fascinating to see how the teacher influenced the student, who has now influenced the teacher.

Despite his shortcomings, Bell's influence on contemporary poetry will continue to be considerable as long as he teaches at the Writers' Workshop in Iowa. In fact, this collection representing more than twenty years of writing is, perhaps, an indicator of the work that many of the workshop's graduates will produce in the next two decades. In Bell's poetry, the sensibility of American adolescence achieves its full, flowering expression.

While Marvin Bell poses as the sensitive domestic writing plant, Gerald Stern's pose in *Lovesick*[3] is that of the ribald but cultured man. The point, as in Bell's poetry, is to celebrate the Self. Though references to music and composers occur again and again, though the protagonist frequently identifies with birds and trees, we gain little insight into conditions foreign to our own.

Stern's methods greatly contribute to this problem. In these celebrations of the small, his cheerful assertions strut in declarative sentences ("I did this"—"I did that") that play light and loose with transition and depend on abstractions (*terror*, *sorrow*, *violence*, *pity*, and so on). Unfortunately, we see all too little of the latter made concrete, so that we might know them. Have we digressed so much that we no longer know how to evoke situations in poetry that correspond

[3] LOVESICK, by *Gerald Stern*. Harper & Row. $16.95; $9.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to these conditions? Do poets really believe that merely referring to these conditions by name is enough?

Sentimentality also constructs its ruin here.

> For fifty years I have rubbed these soft heads
> against my face
> and joined, this way, the men and women who stood
> in the wet meadows and rubbed their faces for hours
> with the brown fur.
>
> "Pussy Willow"

I can understand these lines appearing in someone's private notebook. They are neither poetry, nor are they unusual. In another poem Stern wonders about the other men and women who may have pissed where he has just relieved himself.

It is also a popular form of sentimentality to construct a poem for the sake of a punch line. The most unhappy instance occurs here in "Lillian Harvey." In this poem the composer, Charles Koechlin, cannot bear, finally, to meet the woman for whom he has written "a hundred-and-thirteen compositions." He sends his wife instead, then questions her when she returns. This is promising material, but the narrator cannot resist taking over the second half of the poem. "I know that agony myself," he says. We hear evidence—"I stood / on one foot or another four or five times / and burned with shame and shook with terror"—and we hear speculation—"he never reached his hand inside her dress, / he never touched her nipple"—and it becomes clear that the poem exists only to set up the fatuous declaration with which it concludes: "You never fuck the muse." Our poetry really has begun its liberal assimilation of the popular media.

This excessive book, like so many books before it, commits the fatal mistake of taking the poet's authority for granted. Stern has forgotten, if he ever knew it, that such authority must be earned line by line.

When I reviewed C. K. Williams' last book of poetry, *Tar*, in these pages in 1984, I praised the poet's ability to tell his story without authorial intrusion. Acknowledging the visual monotony of his long, long lines, I nevertheless insisted on their virtuosity, their accurate depiction of dialogue's intimate hesitations.

What I must say about *Flesh and Blood*,[4] his new volume, is quite different. This book consists of one hundred-thirty (and the last is a sequence of eighteen parts) poems of eight lines each, situated two on a page. For some, the visual monotony will be as bad as ever, but now the syntax, vocabulary, and stories do not redeem the poems.

What is fascinating is this poet's fascination with self-destruction.

[4] FLESH AND BLOOD, by *C.K. Williams*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $12.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is as if he decided to take the longest line in contemporary poetry and see how much of a minimalist he could become with it. If that was his goal, he has succeeded. The stories of *Tar* have given way in this book to abstract meditations and occasional scenes that, at best, suggest stories the poet will not tell. Perhaps the most revealing lines in the book conclude "Kin."

What next? Nothing next. Next the wretched history of the world.
The history of the heart.
The theory next that all we are are stories, handed down, that
all we are are parts of speech.
All that limits and defines us: our ancient natures, love and death
and terror and original sin.
And the weary breath, the weary going to and fro, the weary
always knowing what comes next.

The impulse to turn away from story is expressed here, and so is the world-weariness that prompts the poet to turn inward to abstraction (love, death, terror, original sin). Since Williams opts for evasion rather than telling his stories well, his method requires nothing more than the construction of lists. As poem after poem piles up, or piles on, the reader begins to feel like an observer of a series of hit-and-run accidents.

When subject disappears from poems, the spotlight beats down on the language itself and here, too, these poems suffer. Assertions become tiring. In "Cowboys," for example, the poet tells us that the structure of a science fiction movie is like that of a western. Don't all of us know this by now? Most of the poems are shackled by laborious adjectives, and almost as many are marred by clichés. In one poem, lovers are "bruised and swollen"; in another, a skewered pig has an "angry wound." In too many the poet succumbs to the current fashionable temptation to make the most of the shock value of sex.

C. K. Williams can be, and has been, a better poet than this book suggests, but now he must resolve this argument with himself regarding story and renew his narrative strengths. In this book he sounds like many other poets, and that is depressing.

Jane Shore's new book,[5] the Lamont Poetry Selection for 1986, is dominated by description. Its primary subject is a child's isolation and escape through the imagination. The poems stack detail on detail to evoke a fragile world in which time passes too quickly, fictional and biblical characters are real (Thumbelina, Cinderella, Solomon), the fear of being possessed by others is ever-present, and the games of childhood constitute a child's only reality. At their

[5] THE MINUTE HAND, by *Jane Shore*. The University of Massachusetts Press. $14.00; $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

best, the poems are charming. In "Thumbelina," for instance, the child imagines herself as supervisor of an ant colony: "To be a giant, you must learn to step / softly, carefully, so as not to hurt / the working earth." Elsewhere, the poet meditates on the figures adorning a planter's clock: "If only she could slip inside / her pretty trapezoid of home / and cook her husband a good square meal."

But in too many of these poems the charm is undone by what appears to be a crush of description for description's sake. "The Pharaoh" consists almost exclusively of a descriptive list:

> the boy-king was buried
> with his most cherished things
> items he would need
>
> on his journey
> toys, enough food
> for a lifetime, maybe more
>
> a golden cage
> on whose perch
> his canary
> still sings like a rusty hinge
>
> his throne
> his cup

And so on. The list ends with "a star chart / carved on the ceiling / under which / a deep healing is taking place." The "deep healing" is deeply ambiguous, an image set down in a rush toward profundity. The reportage of the poem does not merit the transition. This is the great danger of too heavy a reliance on description to evoke experience. Even the few poems that feature an adult protagonist and point of view suggest an aversion to the experience of daily life. As the poet sidesteps this dilemma, she is likely to drift into inaccuracy. In "Solomon's Sword," a mother's milk comes in abundance only hours after birth rather than the two days it normally takes, and no magic is made of this. In another poem, a bottle is "riding the assembly line of waves." The metaphor suggests monotony, sameness. But who watches waves knows better.

These inaccuracies are troublesome, but it is the book's current of fear that points up its most serious problem. Reading on, one gets the feeling that one side of an equation is missing. In poem after poem, the protagonist's fear is apparent, but what she hopes for is never expressed, and the consequences of her fear are left in darkness.

Sydney Lea's best poetry depicts rough rituals of outdoor living. Men test themselves on the hunt, boys suffer the rites of initiation,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hoping to become their fathers. In *No Sign*,[6] this type of poem shares space with poems that celebrate and mourn domestic life. When he writes in either strain, Lea benefits from having more than a little in him of Randall Jarrell's haunting sense of childhood.

Still, these are contradictory subjects, and they appear to represent the essential conflict of the poet himself. "For all the languor, sweetness I would sing." When writing about the family, this is his goal, and it often leads him into sentimentality. But in the poems set in the great outdoors, this goal bows to the representation of the salt of a very different experience. In the best of these, "How to Leave Nothing," two brothers plot vengeance against a black man who squealed on them after they'd stolen their uncle's horse for some mischief. They pay him back by killing "one of his precious two skinny birds." Devouring the bird in the woods, eating their enemy by consuming what he owned, the brothers curse and revile the man.

> To hell we agreed with the way he would always lay down his hoe or bucket
> full of dung, and take from his pocket those sweat-stained pictures
> —departed wives, the rickety daughter,
> the son who went bad—and curse the Devil, to hell with the rag he reddened
> with coughs and sobbed in, and wiped his hands on. To hell with the hands themselves.

The expression of their cruelty is not easy to forget.

This excerpt represents Lea's most convincing hard-bitten speech, but in the poems of domesticity it gives way to rhetoric of a high style that features florid language evoking the sentimental ("—you two soft in sleep— / those mornings I walked the puppy") and the untrue ("O keep the worm away, I pray, a trope / that loops through boughs, the grave, the house, the lips"). Here the speech of the academy overwhelms the speech of poetry.

A valiant and mainly successful attempt to reconcile these two recurrent strains occurs in "Sereno." A hunter, rather than shoot ducks, chooses to watch them. Enchanted by their grace and beauty, he meditates on forgiveness for all the cruelty of the world. This compassion is present, too, in the good humor of the title poem in which a man buys a camper in a last-ditch attempt to preserve his family as his two children fast approach "adolescent estrangement."

In this book we meet a microcosm of the current conflict between the rhetoric of the high style and the driving rhythms of representational truth. From such conflict we can hope that important poems emerge.

[6] NO SIGN, by *Sydney Lea*. University of Georgia Press. $13.95; $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Like Marvin Bell, Jorie Graham articulates the yearning, ambivalent relativism of contemporary American adolescents. Primary precursors of the current collection[7] include poet-theorists of the Language School and her immediate influential predecessor in poetry, John Ashbery.

The one preoccupation of *The End of Beauty* is process: How best to depict the mind in ambiguous conflict with itself, the equally ambiguous mind of a lover, or the unreachable mind of God. Its language is discursive, eschewing plot and rarely making use of connections, and only then in sparse descriptions or brief anecdotes. Abstractions recur—"The true—the believable—meaning—memory—form"—their way paved by traditional verbs of female sexuality. Bodies and plants *open* or *press*, *tugging*, *clasping*, *coiling*, *knotting*, *sucking*, *darting*, *wrapping*, or *burning* as they do so; minds *flower*, *pull*, or *hold*; the faceless characters, human and animal, *hunger* and *lean* with unfocused provocation.

In the absence of conclusions, these habitual mainstream engines of the sentences seduce the reader who is comfortable with his or her own governing sense of ambiguity and seeks reinforcement of it. The poetry here does not so much represent the finest thought of its culture as it erects a shrewd model of discourse for a culture that is no longer capable of sustaining a serious intellectual debate about what is good and bad in life.

> listen—
> what clicks beneath this talk,
> beneath the hissing of the storyline slipping her dress off
> (closing her mouth almost too suddenly as she unfastens)
> (are you watching?) (are you?)
> (and then on the fortieth morning they—)
> (and then on the fortyfifth morning they—)
> and it has to be noise or you're not getting it,
> something into which your listening
> cannot disappear,
> as in, here they are in each other,
> and here is the daylight now, look,
> and this is the lifted hand up into it,
> and a name repeated slowly to indicate ____,
>
> "Room Tone"

This cunning writing flatters intelligence but does not provoke it. The poet's sensibility, so in tune with the Here and Now of our slack society, accurately represents meaning (for most) as it is taught by the propaganda that assaults contemporary life. But the poet gives little indication here that she understands meaning in the classical sense—that which enriches the struggle to lead a serious life.

[7] THE END OF BEAUTY, by *Jorie Graham*. Ecco Press. $16.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The result here is speculation in a vacuum, the only possible relief afforded by idleness and entertainment.

Nearing the end of his life, Albert Einstein answered a question he had wrestled with all his life: Does God exist? Einstein concluded that God did exist, but did not really care about us. Peter Viereck's God, in his epic cycle, *Archer in the Marrow*,[8] resembles Einstein's deity.

Woven into the texture of this book is a tremendous historical awareness, apt irony, and a rhythmic facility seldom encountered in contemporary poetry. The ghosts behind the rhetoric and sensibility include Beckett, Calvino, the mirthful Byron, and the Son's unnamed, adopted brother, Nietzsche. In addition, Viereck imposes the Yeatsian circular notion of time as a stage on which three main characters, Father, Son, and You (the Everyman) carry out their rigorous debate.

On this stage Old Galilee is interchangeable with New California. The machine subjugates the earth, which means that it subjugates Woman. In the Son's eyes, the Father looks down and sees earth as a toyland. At one point, the Son declares "The race is almost meaningful." The Father's response is stifling: "Your race was never meaningful." Meanwhile, the You constantly questions the pair until late in the poem he comes to this revelation:

> Too long I've been the buffer-brother
> Through whom two prima donnas who won't address each other
> Address each other.

The intention of this debate, of course, is to illuminate Man's struggle for freedom, his struggle to wrest the gift of creativity from the Father's control. The Son, torn between the two, eventually confronts the Father, with the You (man) acting as the congealing agent. By serving this purpose, Man also acts as the agent bringing about his own inner happiness. Optimistically (some might prefer wistfully), the poem ends with "goatfoot Jesus on the village green."

It is rare to meet such serious matter in our poetry now, and for this reason *Archer in the Marrow* may not play immediately to a large audience. It should. In spite of occasional moments when the tone becomes too light-hearted and the rhetoric exalted, Viereck has created a volume that makes the small books of many current poets read like the prattling of pipsqueaks. This poet has pushed his chosen form to the limit and beyond. A useful glossary and long essay, "Form in Poetry," enhance this collection, and the latter will no doubt contribute to the lively debate concerning the resurgence of traditional form in our poetry.

[8] ARCHER IN THE MARROW: The Applewood Cycles, 1967–1987, by *Peter Viereck*. W.W. Norton & Co. $14.95; $6.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARK JARMAN

Monroe Spears and the Judgment of Character

IN THE PREFACE TO THIS COLLECTION of his essays,[1] Monroe Spears describes himself as one who has "always believed in and written for the general reader." In this role, which he fills superbly, he serves as explainer of contemporary literature, partisan of favorite books, and defender and rehabilitator of tarnished reputations. In a few rare instances, his judgments look like prejudices. Yet he articulates his points so clearly and takes his stand so squarely, that it is possible to disagree with him without feeling cranky. Spears engages the reader in an intelligent discussion of the American character as it is manifest in a number of areas, especially poetry and literary criticism, but also including our colonial history, Southern regionalism, and the debate about the role of black culture in American society. In one of his best essays, "The Function of Literary Quarterlies," he remarks that in the United States the "division between 'middlebrow' and 'highbrow' is much more pronounced," whereas in European countries like England and France "the tradition of the intelligent general reader still persists." Although he is clearly right about the American situation, still he offers his views as if there were a persistent tradition in our country of generally interested and generally intelligent readers.

As well as being a former editor of *The Sewanee Review*, Monroe Spears has taught at Vanderbilt, the University of the South, and, until his recent retirement, at Rice where he was Moody Professor of English. These essays show him to be a natural teacher. As such he has a critical ability, rare in our time, to elucidate rather than obfuscate a text, a historical event, or an author's intention. He himself possesses a gift he attributes to Cleanth Brooks and W. H. Auden, which is that of "reducing complex problems to their essentials." Thus, in his essay "Revolution in American Poetry" he makes the apparently simple but vital point that the modern upheavals that have occurred in our poetry since Whitman have their origin in the American Revolution itself and are "bred in the bone." Making it clear that Whitman and Dickinson are the modern forebears of American poetry, he observes about the latter, "beneath [her] sur-

[1] AMERICAN AMBITIONS: Selected Essays on Literary and Cultural Themes, by *Monroe K. Spears*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. $24.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

face primness, she is perhaps more subversive than Whitman." About Robert Lowell's long experiment with the sonnet, abandoned in his last book, he writes in "Life and Art in Robert Lowell," "Although some fine things came out of it, it was a dead end; no solution was found, either philosophically or technically." Robert Penn Warren probably enjoys more of Spears's attention than any other writer he discusses, having two essays dedicated to him, "Robert Penn Warren as Hardy American" and "Robert Penn Warren as Critic." In both Spears is able to put his finger on what is essential. Describing Warren's corrective response to the idealism of the founding fathers and to American transcendentalists, he writes, "One of the tasks he undertakes in his verse is to reconcile the doctrines of American sages with the facts of American history and of human nature." Of Warren the critic, his description might be of Spears himself, "like a good teacher he advocates the writers and principles he believes in." In discussing Warren's great collaborative achievement with Cleanth Brooks, *Understanding Poetry*, Spears points out that many of its principles, like the principles of the New Criticism generally, are based on the way any good teacher practices close reading. In fact, being a critic himself, Spears is especially good on critics and the character that informs their judgment. In the essay "Two Doctors for Critics: René Wellek and Randall Jarrell" he not only portrays these two accurately but implicitly shows which sort of critic he values most. Of Jarrell, he writes, "there was something feline in the way this great cat-lover toyed with his prey." Wellek he compares to F. R. Leavis. "Where Leavis offers a temptation to pride," observes Spears, "Wellek gives the critic a lesson in humility." As with Warren's poetry, as with most poets and critics he singles out for admiration, it is Wellek's historical and global sense that Spears esteems, what he calls Wellek's "wide-ranging synoptic view."

Spears is usually so reasonable, and his principles so logically stated (they include a belief with Allen Tate that religion is a primary element both of art and culture), that when he does grow overtly partisan, his exaggerations are a bit of a surprise. Daniel Hoffman's 1981 epic, *Brotherly Love*, about William Penn and the founding of Philadelphia is described as "not *Paradise Lost*, but . . . perhaps the nearest equivalent now possible." James Dickey's *The Zodiac*, another ambitious long poem albeit not an epic narrative, is said to belong "in some respects with that galaxy of poems produced during World War II, of which the most notable are *Four Quartets*, *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, *Seasons of the Soul*, *For the Time Being*, and *The Sea and the Mirror*." George Garrett's historical novels, *The Death of the Fox* and *Succession*, are said to "belong to the exalted company of *Ulysses* and a very few other works that carry the novel form as far as it can go . . ." And Madison Jones's *A Cry of Absence* is considered by Spears to be "As a novel about Southern racial problems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . the best thing since *Light in August*" and "a major work of art." Although a reader, even a general reader, might be skeptical of these claims, it is important to note that Spears is making them for contemporary works of art. Without a champion like Spears, the living word is often in danger of going to sleep for a century or for good.

When the subject turns political, however, it is impossible not to find oneself at times in open disagreement with him. Perhaps, it is a mark of Spears's generation of Southerners that the issue he has thought about most and addressed most fully is race. In his essay "Black English" Spears finally concludes that, although it is a definite dialect of English, the English spoken by blacks in America is not a separate language and that all the evidence goes to show that it is not a creation of African language and culture. Many sound judgments back him up. Yet Spears seems to believe that all linguistic influence flows from white to black, without considering the possibility that there is at the heart of American life a current between the two races. The influence of black on white is evident wherever the medium of expression has been accessible to blacks—music being the foremost one, but language, especially in the South, being just as prominent. One could admit much that Spears says, were it not for the following paragraph.

> My own opinion is that history interpreted in terms of affirmative action or radical chic is not going to help blacks; there is no black history any more than there is black truth or black justice. For human beings, black or white, there is no escape from the constant struggle to keep in touch with reality; to abandon blacks to fantasies is to patronize and ultimately to betray them.

This reads like the thinking of a reasonable man who is willing to admit only so much, but no more. The appeals to reality and to fact in this essay make one sympathize with recent critics who would argue that reality and fact are often in doubt because of the very means by which they are determined and measured.

When the issue is women, Spears responds with self-conscious attempts at humor. In "Two Women Critics: Helen Vendler and Ursula Le Guin" he begins by speculating why at this late date we should finally have a prominent woman critic like Helen Vendler. Perhaps, he wonders, a sympathetic understanding of an artist's work requires a maternal solicitude. He compliments Vendler for working much as he himself does as a critic, "as a middleman." But then he adds in parenthesis, "middleperson?" In his essay on James Dickey, in discussing Dickey's collection of poems *Puella*, he writes that the female character in the poems is

> Dickey's ideal modern woman, enacting her archetypal feminine role in full mythic resonance, but not enslaved or swallowed up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> by it. If so, Kate Millet and Adrienne Rich may eat their hearts out.

It would be fair to ask, in response to this passage, if Spears fully understands Millet or Rich.

In his preface Spears also includes the motto he learned in Officer Candidate School in World War II, "Never Apologize . . . Accept Responsibility." The virtues of *American Ambitions* far outweigh its apparent flaws. Its greatest virtue is Spears's assessment of character. In the case of two important American critics, Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks, he does a masterful and necessary job of presenting figures who deserve a revaluation of their place in modern American literature. Spears understands that both men require defending and takes up the cudgels for Tate in his essay on Lowell and in the essay "A Little Man Who Was a Writer: R. P. Blackmur." In the latter, he attempts to settle an old score between advocates of the two great critics, asserting that whereas Blackmur's small physical stature was reflected in many personal traits, "Tate, in contrast, though physically not large (except for the head), and certainly not without his faults, was large-minded, generous, and open-handed" even to Blackmur who, it appears, never showed a similar generosity in return. Along with this defense of character, one of the best essays collected here is the oldest, dating from 1949, and deals with Tate's criticism and poetry. Spears argues that there is a fundamental contradiction between Tate's call for a return to traditional values and his belief that great art could only occur, as it had in the South, when a tradition was in decline. Finally, Spears comments that Tate's criticism serves best as an aid to understanding Tate's own poetry. This judgment is not only shrewd and just but, for its time, precocious, too.

One of the most interesting essays here is "Cleanth Brooks and the Responsibilities of Criticism." More than any of the other essays it approaches being a eulogy. Brooks's character is shown to be not only admirable but exemplary. In Brooks's criticism, Spears writes,

> Human experience is seen as complex and contradictory, involving the recognition of evil and hence of duality (indicated by such theoretical devices as ambiguity, irony, and paradox); the point of view is not explicitly or specifically religious, but grounded in the tradition of Christian humanism.

Brooks's religious grounding is important to Spears. But notice, too, that at the same time a cogent argument is being made for that most beleaguered of critical methodologies, the New Criticism. Spears defends this leading proponent of it from attacks that it and its practitioners are rigid, ahistorical, symbol-mongering aesthetes. He lists Brooks's strengths as a critic, implying that these, too, are the strengths of the kind of criticism he practices—responsibility to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the reader, respect for the author and "the complexity and integrity" of his work, and finally respect for "language and historical fact."

Tate's vision of a united art and culture and Brooks's character are both reflections of what Spears calls, in a different context, the Southern temper. He discusses this in one of the book's last essays, "Southern Fictions in Visual Art." He makes the point that a regional art can escape provinciality by being universal and still an expression of local character, for "awareness of places is an essential part of self-knowledge." He believes there are two distinctive Southern qualities that set people of the region apart from other Americans. One is a tendency to be "more humane than people in other regions," which he hastens to qualify as being "sometimes all too human" and, specifically, as emphasizing family and extending the boundaries of kinship. The second is "a propensity for creating and believing fictions—anecdotes, stories, legends, myths—about themselves." Curiously, the second trait sheds light, or casts shadow, on the first. But Spears admits that Southerners "have always been ready to take fiction for fact."

To conclude, although this book is heavily weighted toward literature, people, and issues that are Southern, it opens with two excellent essays on Yankees. Again, they show Spears at his best, as a judge of character. The first, "Cotton Mather," is a review of Kenneth Silverman's biography *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather.* Spears states that "even now, in Imperial America, we can see in ourselves the pushy insecurity of Cotton Mather, at once self-assertive and self-deprecatory." He passes on to us Silverman's word "Matherese" as a description of Mather's ambidextrous attitude characterized by "belligerent courtesy, self-flattering modesty, fretful calm, denigrating compliments, unacceptable offers." It would seem that the judge of the Salem witch trials still presides when America performs an abomination. The second opening essay, from the section called "Ancestors," is "William James as Culture Hero." In this Spears compares James, "the open-minded American of socialist-pacifist inclinations," with "the anti-American old Tory" Samuel Johnson. It is a magnificent feat (Spears is a master of comparison and contrast) and pivots on both men's claim of commonality with humanity. As he does in so many of these essays, Spears captures the essence of character, in this case, America's.

> If the repulsive head of Cotton Mather must be imagined on one side of the American coin, let us hope that James's face—compassionate and humorous as well as profoundly intelligent—embellishes the other; and that we win the toss.

American Ambitions is a valuable book in the tradition of the intelligent general reader.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES FINN COTTER

On the Shoulders of Emile Mâle

BENEATH THE ROSE WINDOW OF CHRIST TRIUMPHANT in the southern transept of Chartres cathedral, four lancet windows portray the four prophets Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah carrying on their shoulders the four apostles Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke. The New Testament writers sit higher and see further than the Old Testament prophets, but it is only thanks to their perch that they can do so. "These solemn figures retain a nobility despite the strangeness of their pose," observes art critic Emile Mâle. Their symbolic posture suits Mâle's own position in contemporary art criticism. Many writers on art have had to climb on his noble shoulders for their current view of the Middle Ages.

In 1898 Mâle published his doctoral thesis on French art in the thirteenth century. During his lifetime, the work went through eight revised editions until 1954, the year of his death at the age of ninety-two. Mâle was thirty-six when his first volume appeared; in 1908 he published his study of the later Middle Ages and in 1922 a third volume on the twelfth century. Chronologically, the last book was first, and in this sequence the three have been republished in the Bollingen Series by Princeton University Press.[1] For this new edition, Mâle's final emendations and additions have been incorporated in the notes and these notes expanded to include more recent publications relating to Mâle's discussions. Although no attempt has been made to refer to all pertinent material and, by my count, no scholarship of the last ten years is cited, these three volumes offer the best available introduction to medieval art and perform an invaluable service for the general reader as well as the specialist. Completely new and exceptionally fine black-and-white photographs illustrate the texts, and a much expanded index has been added with the result that this version vastly improves on the French originals. The translation by Marthiel Mathews is accurate and lively, catching that special lightness of touch that makes Mâle's style so attractive. Harry Bober of New York University has supervised the editing of the set and written an introduction that gives a concise overview of the rediscovery of medieval art from Victor

[1] RELIGIOUS ART IN FRANCE: The Twelfth Century; The Thirteenth Century; The Late Middle Ages, by *Emile Mâle*. Ed. by *Harry Bober*; trans. by *Marthiel Mathews*. Bollingen Series XC: 1, 2, 3. Princeton University Press. $73.50; $75.00; $85.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hugo to Mâle. Unfortunately, this introduction, which appears in the twelfth-century volume, serves for all three; readers of the two later studies find no editorial guidelines or preface. Since each work stands on its own, some statement of procedures and purposes is needed, especially for Mâle's best known study of the thirteenth century, the only one to be previously translated into English as *The Gothic Image*. The improvement over this previous edition makes the substantial price difference worthwhile, but an introduction setting forth the reasons for such improvement would be all the more welcome.

Mâle's great achievement lay in taking the antiquarian and archeological research of the previous century and synthesizing it in a new perspective. His interest remained primarily iconographic, but he brought a historian's desire for accurate data and an artist's love of form to the monuments he studied. As a former teacher of rhetoric and literature, he learned to read sculpture, painting, and stained glass as texts to be interpreted and connected with other similar works. As a student of the Bible and the church fathers, he had information at his fingertips that illuminated what he saw carved in stone or depicted in glass or upon a page. Tracing the pilgrimage routes, Mâle is a walking encyclopedia of the knowledge and lore of the past. Looking at capital decorations in the churches of the Midi, he recalls the same motifs on mosques in Spain and Morocco and relates their scenes to the life of Christ, legends of the saints, or *chansons de geste*. The connections he made have mostly held up, to be extended and refined by other scholars. Mâle's vision is both broad and specific, theologically and historically informed, born of wide reading and personal observation. He seems simultaneously to have lived his life in a library and traveled to the most remote villages of France, Spain, and Italy. Like Edith Wharton, he welcomed the motor car as the answer to a pilgrim's prayer, but he did most of his visiting for these books before the auto's arrival. Mâle missed no Roman road or pilgrimage path in his journey into the past. In 1924, he left his post at the Sorbonne in Paris to become director of the French Archeological Institute in Rome. There he went on to write about the art of the catacombs, and about Renaissance and Baroque ecclestiastical art and iconography.

Mâle discovered the roots of twelfth-century art in Greek and Syrian prototypes. The different portrayals of the unbearded and bearded Christ come to mind, but Mâle finds no end to signs of these influences. In the entry to Jerusalem, for example, Christ sits astride the donkey in Western representations and sidesaddle in the Eastern tradition. The confluence of the two styles, begun in the Carolingian period, climaxes in Romanesque art, with all of Christian Europe following the Near Eastern lead. The miniatures for a Spanish Apocalypse commentary by Beatus of Liebana supplied the pictorial model for the tympanum at Moissac and its cloister capi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tals; from there its influence spread throughout Aquitaine and beyond the Loire valley. Mâle has been said to have exaggerated the impact of illuminated manuscripts on monumental and decorative sculpture, but he admits other sources to the complex evolution of Western art. Besides Hellenistic, Syrian and Byzantine iconography, he traces the effect on medieval art of the liturgy and drama, the cult of the saints, pilgrimages, and popular customs and stories of the working classes. He acknowledges the important contributions of Augustine, Gregory the Great, Honorius, and Hugh of St. Victor. His reference works are the standard *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville and the glossaries of the definition compilers.

The fourfold division of the universe by Vincent of Beauvaise in his *Speculum Majus* into the Mirrors of Nature, Science, Morality, and History gave Mâle the matrix for his analysis of thirteenth-century art. Out of the complexity of the previous period, Mâle found unity emerging in the person of Abbot Suger, a pivotal figure who first articulated the symbolic correspondence in art between the visible and invisible worlds and between the Old and New Testaments. Suger embodied his ideas in architecture and the sculptural program of the church of St. Denis. In the first thousand years of Christian iconography, the crucifixion is rarely represented in its stark reality and God the Father appears only symbolically, never in human form. In the windows of St. Denis, for the first time, the Father is shown supporting his crucified Son. This shift from a cosmic to a humanistic representation of redemption marks a turning point in Western views of ourselves and God, spelled out also by St. Anselm in his new theory of atonement in terms of human responsibility. To Mâle's credit, he perceived that moment expressed in art and recounted it. All the great changes that occur around the year 1200 were already at work in the previous age. Mâle observes that "nearly all the ideas expressed by the magnificent facades of the thirteenth century appeared in the twelfth." Themes that depict the Ascension and the Apocalypse, events of the cosmic redemption, were abandoned in favor of scenes of the Resurrection, Coronation of the Virgin, and Last Judgment, subjects introduced by Romanesque artists. The turn of the century marks the last dynamic expression of the otherworldly victory of the Son of God and the new exploration of the earthly character of the Son of Man and Mary.

For Mâle, Gothic art expresses ideas. He writes: "In the Middle Ages, form always clothed a thought. One might say that thought worked within matter and formed it. Form can never be separated from the idea that created and animated it." He here echoes the words of Victor Hugo: "In the Middle Ages men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone." Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* of 1831 has for its hero not the hunchback who crops up mysteriously in the English title, but the cathedral herself at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heart of the city and its people. Hugo's message struck at the conscience of France and her continuity with her own past. For thirty years after the revolution, the Abbey of Cluny was used as a public quarry and dismantled. Churches and abbeys everywhere lay in ruins. Following the pilgrimage roads from Vezelay and Le Puy to Santiago de Compostela, Mâle looked with regret at the wrecked monuments and the ambiguous restorations already begun. In the church treasuries, he mourned the loss of the reliquaries and shrines fashioned by the Limoges goldsmiths. He writes: "Occasionally, in a village church surrounded by the heather and flowering black wheat of Limousin, we come upon an enamel reliquary which tells the story of St. Dulcidius or St. Psalmodius, or the hermit saint, Viance. . . ." A litany of obscure saints ensues, each with his own golden legend as part of Mâle's remarkable memory and genuine affection. These distant memorials come alive in his descriptions of their stories in stone.

Not every decoration told a story or cried out for some scholarly interpretation. Mâle appreciated the high spirits and imagination of medieval artists and he anticipated Meyer Schapiro's approach to the aesthetic expressionism found in this early art. Mâle's study of the seasons and labors of the months is imbued with his warm love of detail and his eye for imagery. Mâle never allows his knowledge of iconography to overwhelm his enthusiasm for the human content of the calendar reliefs. January is the month of festivals and indoor rest, while in harsh February, "the peasant stays at home when he is not obliged to go out, and warms himself beside a roaring fire." In March the peasant goes to the vineyard, and so through the calendar Mâle follows the peasants into the fields for planting, mowing, and harvesting, for gathering grapes and fermenting wine, and for preparing again for winter.

The same sensitivity to imagery is found in Mâle's depiction of the influence of scenes from the *Meditations on the Life of Jesus Christ* on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century art. From the Nativity to the Passion new depths of emotion enrich the drama of Christ's earthly existence. Mâle plumbs the Franciscan spirit also in the artistic treatment of the Virgin and saints. From the fourteenth century onward, the compassion of Mary, her part in her Son's Passion, developed first in manuscript painting before flowering in the form of Pietà sculptures. Mâle seeks out these popular devotional images "in the half-light of village churches." Sometimes the workmanship is admirable, more often it is rough and crude, he admits, but it never fails to move him. In entombment statuary, Mâle discovers the impact of theater, and in funereal monuments, he traces the sober obsession with death that marks the waning of the Middle Ages. The great cathedrals and ruined abbeys became beautiful necropolises, housing not the living but the dead.

A collection of Mâle's essays, first published in 1927 and revised

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for a fourth edition in 1947, has now been translated for the first time by Sylvia Stallings Lowe.[2] *Art and Artists of the Middle Ages* provides a helpful supplement to the Princeton series and offers a sharp insight into the author's methods. Here are the discoveries of an alert, acute observer as he first published them, full of enthusiasm, scholarship, and personal points of view. Through well-chosen words, Mâle recreates churches and works of art and, in his vividly poetic descriptions, evokes the landscapes of France, its valleys, hills, and towns. In this handsomely produced and well-illustrated edition, the art critic himself appears as a teacher and guide.

Another translation of a book by Mâle, *Chartres*,[3] has also been recently published in a lavishly illustrated format. The attractive plates, however, are not always integrated with the text. For example, two windows dealing with the lives of St. Germain of Auxerre and St. Julian the Hospitaller are described in great detail, but no photographs of the windows are included. Nowhere is it indicated that this book was first published in 1948, so that Mâle's claim in his preface that his monograph attempts to sum up "the most recent architectural discoveries" does him no service and may deceive the reader. Still, in typical fashion, Mâle reviews the history of the cathedral swiftly and accurately, drawing attention to the rich monumental sculpture and stained glass in all their varied iconography. He inspires us to want to see Chartres for ourselves: "Better than any book, Chartres cathedral resurrects the Middle Ages in France, and brings them literally within our grasp."

Mâle knew that the subjects he wrote about were better than any book of his about them, but he manages to bring these monuments of faith and artistry closer to home for us all. Like the authors of the Middle Ages, he fits his own summary of their efforts: "Literary pride, an author's vanity, was unknown in the early Middle Ages; it was only too evident that a doctrine belonged not to the one who set it forth, but to the Church. To write a book at that time was in some way to perform one of the works of mercy, to make known the truth to others, by whatever means." Mâle has made many truths known, and for that work of mercy and these new editions of his work, readers can be grateful.

[2] ART AND ARTISTS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, by *Emile Mâle*. Trans. by *Sylvia Stallings Lowe*. Black Swan Books. $35.00.

[3] CHARTRES, by *Emile Mâle*. Trans. by *Sarah Wilson*. Photographs by *Pierre Devinoy* and *Jacques Nestgen*. Harper & Row. $25.45; $18.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors,

The preoccupation with Robert Bly's status as a poet ("The Successful Career of Robert Bly," Summer 1987) is not Robert Bly's but Dana Gioia's. Mr. Gioia seems bent on denying Bly the imaginary award of "Major Poet." In his fervor to accomplish his mission Mr. Gioia ignores much of Bly's work (the prose poems, for instance, are not even mentioned), concentrates on biography and generalizes from only a few samples of Bly's poetry to prove his point.

Mr. Gioia's assessment of Bly's translations is particularly objectionable in that he holds Bly responsible for all bad poetry written in imitation of his translations. How many bad imitations of Yeats are there, or Eliot? Do we hold these poets responsible or deny their importance? Robert Bly's translations opened a door for many of us, allowed us a glimpse, at least, of a world of poetry we had not known. In many cases the poets Bly has translated were not previously translated into English or were available only in unreadable versions (the sort Mr. Gioia evidently prefers) where often the literal sense of the poem has been lost. No one, I think, expects a translation to recreate the original perfectly. In any translation something is lost, but it should be an impetus to read further, in that poet's own language, if possible. Robert Bly's translations are lively and readable. His work stirred our interest in European and Spanish-American poetry and brought new energy to much of the poetry written in the U.S. in the last twenty years. Mr. Gioia would probably include the work of James Wright in his "school of mediocrities," yet Wright's work (influenced by Robert Bly) remains a valuable and important part of contemporary poetry.

Although Mr. Gioia says little about the book he is ostensibly reviewing, he objects to Bly's prose introductions to the poems. It seems Mr. Gioia feels that true poetry can exist only in a kind of pristine laboratory environment untainted by impure prose, yet Wordsworth wrote extensive prose explanations of his poetry, as did Whitman. Surely Mr. Gioia, who wants to establish guidelines as to what is acceptable, must recognize this precedent.

Robert Bly has always taken risks in his poetry and has sometimes failed, yet some of his work is the best and most interesting written in the last thirty years. It is a poetry that is alive and changing. Mr. Gioia is not interested in living work but prefers his poets stuck on a pin, neatly labeled. Mr. Gioia's main objection to Bly's work is that it sounds like Robert Bly. Otherwise, his review merely parrots earlier negative reviews of Bly's work, an indication of the reviewer's lack of insight. Reading Mr. Gioia's review it becomes clear that he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wants to put Robert Bly in his place: phylum, class, order . . . Heaven forbid Bly should be thought of as a "Major Poet."

Robert Bly's place in the history of American poetry will be determined by future readers. Meanwhile, a poet whose work has been important to so many readers deserves a more thorough and thoughtful review than the one Dana Gioia has given us.

Duluth, Minnesota LOUIS JENKINS

Dana Gioia replies:

I am not surprised that Louis Jenkins wishes to simplify my views on Robert Bly. Mr. Jenkins is a Bly fan, and like all fans he offers his hero unconditional admiration. Anyone who qualifies or dissents from pure praise is seen as a character assassin. The responsibility of a critic, however, is to make more careful discriminations. I tried to make just those difficult sorts of distinctions in discussing Bly's prolific and wildly uneven poetic career. My assessment was not so negative as Mr. Jenkins remembers. As I said, I felt Bly's volume, *The Light Around the Body*, contained some of "the most stunning political poems in American literature." Hardly a small compliment. But I could not let admiration for that work blind me to the astonishing decline of his subsequent writing. How such a dynamic and talented poet could sink so rapidly into mediocrity struck me not only as an interesting but an important topic of critical inquiry.

I am at a loss in responding to Mr. Jenkins' odd assertion that I said "little about the book" I was "ostensibly reviewing" and offered "only a few samples of Bly's poetry" to substantiate my arguments. Although my essay covered Bly's entire career, I spent nine out of seventeen pages focusing specifically on his *Selected Poems* and the work the author had chosen to preserve in that volume. Likewise I presented all or part of nine Bly poems and translations. To have quoted much more I—like poor Ian Hamilton—might have been dragged into court for overstepping the "fair use" doctrine.

I would answer Mr. Jenkins' objections to my use of Bly's biography in two ways. First, in discussing any writer's life work, it seems legitimate to use the author's biography as an intellectual framework. Second, in Bly's case a biographical focus is unavoidable since the author himself repeatedly insists on precisely such a reading of his work—not only in his numerous essays and interviews but also in the prose notes to his *Selected Poems* which Mr. Jenkins so greatly admires.

As for Bly's translations, I did not fault them because of their bad influence, though I felt it was important to note that deleterious impact. I found fault because they are too often awkward, dull, and simplistic. Once again I demonstrated those faults through quotation

(continued on page 704)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

SERGIO PEROSA* is Professor of English and American literature at the University of Venice (Italy). He writes regularly for the *Corriere della Sera*, and is the author of *Le isole Aran* (1987), a collection of essays. . . . An English translation of JEAN STAROBINSKI's book on Rousseau has just been published by the University of Chicago Press. He recently edited the complete poetry and novels of the French poet Pierre Jean Jouve for the Mercure de France publishing house. He lives in Geneva, Switzerland. . . . RICHARD PEVEAR was recently awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to translate a collection of poems by Yves Bonnefoy. His translation of *The Childhood of Nivasio Dolcemare*, by Alberto Savinio, will be published in the spring. . . . CARL WOOTON teaches at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. . . . TEMMA EHRENFELD* has lived in New York City since 1984, when she earned a B.A. in English from Yale College. She is writing a collection of short stories . . . . JOYCE CAROL OATES was recently named the first Roger S. Berlind Distinguished Lecturer at Princeton University. Recent books of hers are *On Boxing* (Doubleday/Dolphin) and *You Must Remember This* (Dutton). . . . ANDREW HUDGINS teaches at the University of Cincinnati. In 1988 Houghton Mifflin is publishing his book-length narrative sequence entitled *After the Lost War*. . . . ROBERT SCHULTZ's poems in this issue are from a recently completed book manuscript, *The Magnitude of the Possible*. He is working on a book about the development of Ezra Pound's poetry and poetics. . . . MARK WILLIAMS buys and sells houses in Evansville, Indiana. . . . DENNIS SAMPSON* is the author of *The Double Genesis* (Story Line Press). . . . In June of 1987 PHILIP LEVINE received the Ruth Lilly Award from the Modern Poetry Association and the American Council for the Arts. His new book, *A Walk with Tom Jefferson*, is due out in April from Knopf.

The author of five books of poems, JOHN RIDLAND has taught English at the University of California at Santa Barbara since 1961. . . . LOUIS SIMPSON has two books scheduled for publication next fall: *Definite Connections: Selected Prose*, and *From Carentan to Green Harbor: Collected Poems*. He received the Elmer Holmes Bobst Award for poetry in 1987. . . . MAURYA SIMON* is a Lecturer in the Creative Writing Program at the University of California, Riverside. . . . BARRY SPACKS teaches at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His fifth collection, *Spacks Street: New and Selected Poems* (Johns Hopkins), won the Poetry Medal of the Commonwealth Club of California. . . . ALFRED DORN, a Professor of English at Queensborough Community College, New York, is a fre-

(continued on page 704)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUME XL

AUTHORS

Allen, Dick: Poetry Chronicle: Shrinkages and Expansions 507
Ammons, A. R.: Inclinations (*poem*) 59
Why Is It Always the Way It Is; Motion Which Disestablishes Organizes Everything; Forerunners; The Time Rate of Change; Loving People; Ah; Slights of Sight; Fall's End (*poems*) 286
Bawer, Bruce: A Letter to Cambridge (*poem*) 449
Berry, Wendell: Writer and Region 15
Bloom, Alice: Fiction Chronicle: Shorted Out 323
Bowers, Neal: Space Burial; For the Piano Tuner (*poems*) 427
Busch, Trent: Clytemnestra at the Palace Wall (*poem*) 446
Cardullo, Bert: Film Chronicle: Sid, Nancy, and Thérèse 121
Film Chronicle: Viet Nam Revisited 458
Film Chronicle: Working Girls, Playful Boys 647
Clark, Robert S.: Music Chronicle . 93
Music Chronicle 306
Cotter, James Finn: Poetry Chronicle: Public and Private Poetry 149
On the Shoulders of Emile Mâle (*review*) 691
Cox, C.B.: Jane Austen as Free Spirit (*review*) 331
Bisexual Shakespeare? (*review*) ... 481
Dharwadker, Vinay: Sunday at the Lodi Gardens (*poem*) 445
Dorn, Alfred: In Afternoon Light; Apparition (*poems*) 635
Ehrenfeld, Temma: The History of a Little Girls' Game 584
Fairchild, B. H.: The Structures of Everyday Life (*poem*) 295
Flower, Dean: Nabokov's Private Eye (*review*) 165
Fiction Chronicle: Anywhere But Here 313
Fromm, Harold: The Lives and Deaths of Charlotte Brontë: A Case of Literary Politics 233
Gardner, Geoffrey: Annual (*poem*) . 450
Gioia, Dana: The Successful Career of Robert Bly 207
Notes on the New Formalism 395
Goldgar, Harry: Emily Dickinson's Wrestle with God (*review*) 337
Only Connect! Guy Davenport in the Modern World (*review*) 495
Gordimer, Nadine: Bennett Award Acceptance Speech, 1986 182
Gorra, Michael: Fiction Chronicle .. 136
Film Chronicle: Personae 655
Grosholz, Emily: Poetry Chronicle: Marriages and Partings 156
Haines, John: From *Death and the Miser;* The Sleepwalkers; Head of Sorrow, Head of Thought (*poems*) 437
Hall, James Baker: The Dogs (*poem*) 89
Harrison, Jeffrey: In the Attic (*poem*) 86
Hill, Kathleen: Flood (*story*) 71
Hornby, Richard: Theatre Chronicle: Theatre Companies in New York 113
Theatre Chronicle: Theatre in Washington, D.C. 297
Theatre Chronicle: Our Middle-Aged Avant-Garde 465
Theatre Chronicle: The London Theatre 637
Hudgins, Andrew: What's My Line? A Poetry Chronicle 517
The Hereafter; Green Inside the Door: A Memory; Bewilderments of the Eye; Fruit; Worlds (*poems*) 609
Jarman, Mark: The Home (*poem*) .. 79
Poetry Chronicle: Scale of Engagement, from Self to Form Itself 343
Monroe Spears and the Judgment of Character (*review*) 686
Jennings, Kate: Wrist; The Night Wind: Charles Burchfield; Pumpkin; Mail Delivery by Moonlight; Faithless Moon (*poems*) 390
Kearns, George: Fiction Chronicle: Post-Colonial Fiction: Our Custom Is Different 487
Kellogg, Michael: The Squirrel's Heartbeat: Some Thoughts on the Later Style of Henry James 432
Knies, Elizabeth: Letter from Kobe 358
Krist, Gary: Health (*story*) 367

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lesser, Wendy: Fiction Chronicle: Serious Comedy 661
Levine, Philip: These Streets (*poem*) 625
Lifson, Martha Ronk: The Seitz Theater (*poem*)..... 88
Lomas, Herbert: The Poetry of Ted Hughes..... 409
McDowell, Robert: Poetry Chronicle: Collisions in Poetry 677
Mahapatra, Jayanta: Another Autumn (*poem*)..... 443
Mazzaro, Jerome: Off Naxos (*poem*) 448
Morse, J. Mitchell: The Madeleine and the Slate Pencil..... 91
Mullarkey, Maureen: Art Chronicle: A Medicine Show and Some Others 103
Tuesday at the Met..... 193
Oates, Joyce Carol: Playground (*poem*)..... 90
Jekyll/Hyde 603
Parini, Jay: The Power of the Text (*review*) 501
Perosa, Sergio: Letter from Venice 534
Pevear, Richard, trans.: Windows: From Rousseau to Baudelaire, by Jean Starobinski..... 551
Pritchard, William H.: Fordie (*review*)..... 172
Santayana's Legacy (*review*) 473
Ridland, John: To Helen (*poem*).... 627
Rutsala, Vern: Talking to Strangers (*poem*)..... 85
Sampson, Dennis: 1959; An Actual Wife (*poems*)..... 622
Schultz, Robert: January 1, 1987; In This Dark Pool, Our Marriage Bed; Two or Three Dreams of Spring (*poems*)..... 615
Shaw, Alan: Phaedra in Tact 225
Siegel, Marcia B.: Brat Ballerina and the Forces of Evil: A Romance (*review*)..... 131
Dance Chronicle: Putting a Little Orange in Their Life 451
Simon, Maurya: Boy Crazy (*poem*) . 631
Simpson, Louis: A Visitor (*poem*) ... 629
Sisk, John P.: The Devil and American Epic 31
Smith, Peter J.: Life of Beethoven (*story*)..... 251
Spacks, Barry: Inheritors (*poem*).... 633
Starobinski, Jean: Windows: From Rousseau to Baudelaire, trans. by Richard Pevear..... 551
Stiller, Nikki: A Sad and Beautiful Film..... 48
Thompson, Phyllis Hoge: The Light on the Door (*poem*)..... 296
Watson, George: Letter from London 6
Educating the Prime Minister.... 184
Cities of Light..... 543
Wayman, Tom: A Yellow Cottage (*poem*)..... 279
Wilhelmus, Tom: Fiction Chronicle: Nothing Pretentious about Life and Art..... 669
Williams, Mark: Refrigerator Queen; Particulates (*poems*) 619
Wooton, Carl: Ramblers and Spinners (*story*) 561

BOOKS REVIEWED

(Listed by Author)

Arensberg, Ann: *Group Sex: A Romantic Comedy* (Michael Gorra) ... 136
Beattie, Ann: *Where You'll Find Me* (Alice Bloom) 323
Bell, Madison Smartt: *Zero db and Other Stories* (Dean Flower)..... 313
Bell, Marvin: *New and Selected Poems* (Robert McDowell)..... 677
Bellow, Saul: *More Die of Heartbreak* (Wendy Lesser)..... 661
Berg, Stephen: *In It* (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Bienek, Horst: *September Light*, trans. by Ralph R. Read (Dean Flower) 313
Bissoondath, Neil: *Digging Up the Mountains* (Michael Gorra)..... 136
Bly, Robert: Selected Poems; News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness (Dana Gioia) . 208
Böll, Heinrich: *The Casualty*, trans. by Leila Vennewitz (Tom Wilhelmus)..... 669
Bonnefoy, Yves: *Poems 1959-1975*, trans. by Richard Pevear (Emily Grosholz) 156
Booth, Philip: *Relations: Selected Poems 1950-1985* (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Broch, Hermann: *The Spell*, trans. by H. F. Broch de Rotherman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Dean Flower) 313
Brooks, Jeremy: *Doing the Voices* (Alice Bloom) 323
Buckley, Christopher: *Dust Light, Leaves* (Dick Allen) 507
Byer, Kathryn Stripling: *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest* (Emily Grosholz) 156
Carlson, Ron: *The News of the World* (Alice Bloom) 323
Carter, Angela: *Saints and Strangers* (Michael Gorra) 136
Collier, Michael: *The Clasp and Other Poems* (Mark Jarman) 343
Crace, Jim: *Continent* (George Kearns) 487
Curley, Daniel: *Mummy* (Dean Flower) 313
Curtis, Tony: *Poems: Selected and New* (Dick Allen) 507
Daniels, Kate and Richard Jones, eds.: *Of Solitude and Silence: Writings on Robert Bly* (Dana Gioia) ... 208
Davenport, Guy: *Every Force Evolves a Form* (Harry Goldgar) 495
Dobyns, Stephen: *Cemetery Nights* (Dick Allen) 507
Dove, Rita: *Thomas and Beulah* (Emily Grosholz) 156
Dybek, Stuart: *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* (Alice Bloom) 323
Erdrich, Louise: *The Beet Queen* (Michael Gorra) 136
Fainlight, Ruth: *Fifteen to Infinity* (Mark Jarman) 343
Feldman, Irving: *All of Us Here* (Emily Grosholz) 156
Field, Andrew: *VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (Dean Flower) 165
Ford, Ford Madox: *The Ford Madox Ford Reader*, ed by Sondra Stang (William H. Pritchard) 172
Fulton, Alice: *Palladium* (Mark Jarman) 343
Gibian, George, ed. and additional trans.: *The Selected Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*, trans. by Ewald Osers (James Finn Cotter) 149
Gilliatt, Penelope: *22 Stories* (Alice Bloom) 323
Golding, William: *Close Quarters* (Tom Wilhelmus) 669
Gordimer, Nadine: *A Sport of Nature* (Tom Wilhelmus) 669
Graham, Jorie: *The End of Beauty* (Robert McDowell) 677
Hacker, Marilyn: *Love, Death, the Changing of the Seasons* (Mark Jarman) 343
Hill, Geoffrey: *Collected Poems* (Dick Allen) 507
Holzberger, William G. and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., eds.: *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography* by George Santayana, with introduction by Richard C. Lyons (William H. Pritchard) 473
Ignatow, David: *New and Collected Poems, 1970-1985* (James Finn Cotter) 149
Jones, Richard and Kate Daniels, eds.: *Of Solitude and Silence: Writings on Robert Bly* (Dana Gioia) ... 208
Jones, Richard: *Country of Air* (Dick Allen) 507
Katrovas, Richard: *Snug Harbour* (Mark Jarman) 343
Kawabata, Yasunari: *The Old Capital*, trans. by J. Martin Holman (Tom Wilhelmus) 669
Kirkland, Gelsey with Greg Lawrence: *Dancing on My Grave* (Marcia B. Siegel) 131
Klima, Ivan: *My Merry Mornings*, trans. by George Theiner (Alice Bloom) 323
Lea, Sydney: *No Sign* (Robert McDowell) 677
Leavitt, David: *The Lost Language of Cranes* (Michael Gorra) 136
Lehman, David: *An Alternative to Speech* (Mark Jarman) 343
Lopes, Henri: *The Laughing Cry: An African Cock and Bull Story*, trans. by Gerald Moore (George Kearns) 487
Lynch, Thomas: *Skating with Heather Grace* (Dick Allen) 507
McCormick, John: *George Santayana* (William H. Pritchard) 473
McDowell, Robert: *Quiet Money* (Andrew Hudgins) 517
McPherson, William: *To the Sargasso Sea* (Tom Wilhelmus) 669
Mâle, Emile: *Art and Artists of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Sylvia Stallings Lowe; *Chartres*, trans. by Sarah Wilson; *Religious Art in France: The Twelfth Century; The Thirteenth Century; The Late Middle Ages*, trans. by Marthiel Mathews (James Finn Cotter) 691
Marahimin, Ismail: *And the War Is Over*, trans. by John H. McGlynn (George Kearns) 487

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Martin, Charles: *Steal the Bacon* (Dick Allen) 507
Matthews, William: *Foreseeable Futures* (Andrews Hudgins) 517
Mazzaro, Jerome: *Rubbings* (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Morris, Wright: *Collected Stories 1948-1986* (Alice Bloom) 323
Mulhern, Maureen: *Parallax* (Andrew Hudgins) 417
Munro, Alice: *The Progress of Love* (Michael Gorra) 136
Nabokov, Vladimir: *The Enchanter*, trans. by Dmitri Nabokov (Dean Flower) 165
Norris, Leslie: *Selected Poems* (Dick Allen) 507
Olds, Sharon: *The Gold Cell* (Andrew Hudgins) 517
Parotti, Phillip: *The Greek Generals Talk* (Michael Gorra)..... 136
Pequigney, Joseph: *Such Is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (C. B. Cox)..... 481
Phillips, Robert: *Personal Accounts* (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Powell, Anthony: *The Fisher King* (Michael Gorra) 136
Prunty, Wyatt: *What Women Know, What Men Believe* (Emily Grosholz) 156
Pulaski, Jack: *The St. Veronica Gig Stories* (Alice Bloom) 323
Ramirez, Sergio: *Stories*, trans. by Nick Caistor (Alice Bloom) 323
Rogers, Patiann: *The Tattooed Lady in the Garden* (Dick Allen) 507
Rosenberg, Liz: *The Fire Music* (Andrew Hudgins) 517
Roth, Joseph: *Hotel Savoy*, trans. by John Hoare (Alice Bloom)..... 323
Saatkamp, Herman J., Jr., and William G. Holzberger, eds.: *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography* by George Santayana, with introduction by Richard C. Lyon (William H. Pritchard) 473
Sacks, Peter: *In These Mountains* (Emily Grosholz)..... 156
Santayana, George: *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, ed. by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., with introduction by Richard C. Lyon (William H. Pritchard) 473
Schoenberger, Nancy: *Girl On a White Porch* (Andrew Hudgins)... 517
Scholes, Robert: *Textual Power* (Jay Parini)..... 501
Seifert, Jaroslav: *The Selected Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert*, trans. by Ewald Osers, ed., and with additional translations by George Gibian (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Shapiro, Alan: *Happy Hour* (Andrew Hudgins) 517
Shore, Jane: *The Minute Hand* (Robert McDowell) 677
Simpson, Mona: *Anywhere But Here* (Dean Flower) 313
Slavitt, David R.: *The Hussar* (Tom Wilhelmus)..... 669
Snodgrass, W. D.: *Selected Poems 1957-1987* (Robert McDowell).... 677
Söderbergh, Bengt: *The Mysterious Barricades*, trans. by Eivor Martinus (George Kearns)..... 487
Spears, Monroe K.: *American Ambitions: Selected Essays on Literary and Cultural Themes* (Mark Jarman)... 686
Stang, Sondra, ed.: *The Ford Madox Ford Reader* (William H. Pritchard) 172
Stead, Christina: *Ocean of Story* (Alice Bloom) 323
Stern, Gerald: *Lovesick* (Robert McDowell) 677
Stow, Randolph: *Visitants* (George Kearns)..... 487
Süskind, Patrick: *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, trans. by John E. Woods (Michael Gorra)..... 136
Swados, Harvey: *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn* (Alice Bloom).... 323
Tallent, Elizabeth: *In Constant Flight* (Dean Flower)..... 313
Tanner, Tony: *Jane Austen* (C. B. Cox)..... 331
Tate, James: *Reckoner* (Dick Allen) . 507
Taylor, Peter: *A Summons to Memphis* (Dean Flower)..... 313
Tertz, Abram: *Fantastic Stories*, trans. by Richard Lourie (Wendy Lesser)..... 661
Thomas, R. S.: *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (James Finn Cotter)..... 149
Thompson, Phyllis H.: *The Ghosts of Who We Were* (James Finn Cotter) 149
Tomlinson, Charles: *Collected Poems* (Dick Allen)..... 507
Updike, John: *Trust Me* (Wendy Lesser)..... 661
Viereck, Peter: *Archer in the Marrow: The Applewood Cycles, 1967-1987* (Robert McDowell)..... 677
Voinovich, Vladimir: *Moscow 2042* (Wendy Lesser)..... 661

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2PLUS2

A Collection of International Writing

Contributors to 2PLUS2 include:

Manlio Argueta
Kenneth Bernard
Robert Bly
Jorge Luis Borges
Paul Bowles
Victor Brombert
Paul Celan
E.M. Cioran
Amy Clampitt
Stephen Dixon
Sergei Dovlatov
Richard Exner
Ellen Gilchrist
Paavo Haavikko
Michael Hamburger
John Hollander
Miroslav Holub
Friedericke Mayröcker
J.D. McClatchy
Eugenio Montale
Adolf Muschg
Robert Pinget
Joyce Carol Oates
Brenda Marie Osbey
Alberto Rios
Jaroslav Seifert
Eva Ström
Tomas Tranströmer

"One of the most beautiful collections of poetry, fiction, interviews, drama and essays we've seen."
- Writer's Digest

MYLABRIS PRESS LTD.
P.O. Box 20725
New York, N.Y. 10025
U.S.A.

Case postale 35
1000 Lausanne 25
Switzerland

Volume Six: $15.95 plus $2.50 shipping and handling.

Back Issues:
Nos. 1, 2, 3: $ 6.95
Nos. 4, 5: $11.75
Plus $2.50 postage per book.

U.S. Postal Service
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION
(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1A. TITLE OF PUBLICATION	1B. PUBLICATION NO	2. DATE OF FILING
The Hudson Review	2 5 3 6 4 0	10/01/87
3. FREQUENCY OF ISSUE	3A. NO. OF ISSUES PUBLISHED ANNUALLY	3B. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION PRICE
Quarterly	4	$18.00

4. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF KNOWN OFFICE OF PUBLICATION (Street, City, County, State and ZIP+4 Code) (Not printers)
684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

5. COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF THE HEADQUARTERS OR GENERAL BUSINESS OFFICES OF THE PUBLISHER (Not printer)
The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

6. FULL NAMES AND COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS OF PUBLISHER, EDITOR, AND MANAGING EDITOR (This item MUST NOT be blank)

PUBLISHER (Name and Complete Mailing Address)
The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

EDITOR (Name and Complete Mailing Address)
Paula Deitz, Frederick Morgan, 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

MANAGING EDITOR (Name and Complete Mailing Address)
Ronald Koury, 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021

7. OWNER (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated.) (Item must be completed.)

FULL NAME	COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS
The Hudson Review, Inc., 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021 a New York membership corporation not authorized to issue stock whose members are: Paula Deitz, John N. Loomis, Vincent H. Marchia, Lisa Dyer Merrill, Frederick Morgan George Parker, Jr., Charles K. Warner, all at above address.	

8. KNOWN BONDHOLDERS, MORTGAGEES, AND OTHER SECURITY HOLDERS OWNING OR HOLDING 1 PERCENT OR MORE OF TOTAL AMOUNT OF BONDS, MORTGAGES OR OTHER SECURITIES (If there are none, so state)

FULL NAME	COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS
NONE	

9. FOR COMPLETION BY NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AUTHORIZED TO MAIL AT SPECIAL RATES (Section 423.12 DMM only)
The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes: (Check one)

(1) ☒ HAS NOT CHANGED DURING PRECEDING 12 MONTHS
(2) ☐ HAS CHANGED DURING PRECEDING 12 MONTHS (If changed, publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

10. EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION (See instructions on reverse side)	AVERAGE NO. COPIES EACH ISSUE DURING PRECEDING 12 MONTHS	ACTUAL NO. COPIES OF SINGLE ISSUE PUBLISHED NEAREST TO FILING DATE
A. TOTAL NO. COPIES (Net Press Run)	4849	4876
B. PAID AND/OR REQUESTED CIRCULATION 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	2212	2250
2. Mail Subscription (Paid and/or requested)	2410	2435
C. TOTAL PAID AND/OR REQUESTED CIRCULATION (Sum of 10B1 and 10B2)	4622	4685
D. FREE DISTRIBUTION BY MAIL, CARRIER OR OTHER MEANS SAMPLES, COMPLIMENTARY, AND OTHER FREE COPIES	56	55
E. TOTAL DISTRIBUTION (Sum of C and D)	4678	4740
F. COPIES NOT DISTRIBUTED 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	171	136
2. Return from News Agents	0	0
G. TOTAL (Sum of E, F1 and 2 - should equal net press run shown in A)	4849	4876

11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete
SIGNATURE AND TITLE OF EDITOR, PUBLISHER, BUSINESS MANAGER, OR OWNER
Paula Deitz, Editor

PS Form 3526, July 1986 (See instructions on reverse)

LEVERTOV • LORCA • MERTON • HENRY MILLER • MISHIMA
BORGES • CÉLINE • CREELEY • H.D. • DUNCAN • FERLINGHETTI • GUSTAFSSON
NABOKOV • PAZ • POUND • REXROTH • RIMBAUD • STEVIE SMITH • TABUCCHI
DYLAN THOMAS • TENNESSEE WILLIAMS • W. C. WILLIAMS

NEW DIRECTIONS

READERS:
We cordially invite you to join our friends mailing list.

NEW DIRECTIONS
80 Eighth Avenue, NYC 10011

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY/STATE _____ ZIP _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

West, Jessamyn: *Collected Stories* (Alice Bloom) 323
Williams, C. K.: *Flesh and Blood* (Robert McDowell)..... 677
Wilson, A. N.: *Love Unknown* (Wendy Lesser)..... 661
Wolff, Cynthia Griffin: *Emily Dickinson* (Harry Goldgar)..... 337
Wrigley, Robert: *Moon in a Mason Jar* (Mark Jarman)..... 343

VOLUME XL

Spring 1987 (No. 1) pages 1–176; Summer 1987 (No. 2) pages 177–352; Autumn 1987 (No. 3) pages 353–528; Winter 1988 (No. 4) pages 529–704

Dana Gioia replies: *(continued from p. 697)*

and comparison with the originals. To claim that because I dislike Bly's monochromatic translations I therefore prefer "unreadable versions" which lose "the literal sense of the poem" is an assertion too silly to address. I expect at a minimum two qualities in a poetic translation. First, the new version should accurately recreate the sense of the original. Second, the translation should hold together as a poem in its new language. Bly's translations too often accomplish the first task at the expense of the second.

Perhaps Mr. Jenkins' "future readers" will be more generous. I doubt it. Posterity tends to be the most demanding judge of all.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS (continued from page 698)

quently published poet. . . . BERT CARDULLO teaches film and modern drama at the University of Richmond, Virginia. . . . MICHAEL GORRA teaches English at Smith College. He is completing a book entitled *From the Leaning Tower: The English Novel at Mid-Century*. . . . WENDY LESSER is the founding editor and publisher of *The Threepenny Review*. In the fall, Faber & Faber published her first book, *The Life Below Ground: A Study of the Subterranean in Literature and History*. . . . TOM WILHELMUS* is Associate Professor of English and chairman of the Department of English at the University of Southern Indiana. . . . ROBERT McDOWELL is the author of *Quiet Money*, published by Henry Holt in 1987. . . . MARK JARMAN teaches at Vanderbilt University. His latest book of poetry is *Far and Away*. . . . JAMES FINN COTTER spent the fall teaching Homer, fairy tales, and composition at Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, New York.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A brilliant analysis of our diminished intellectual life."

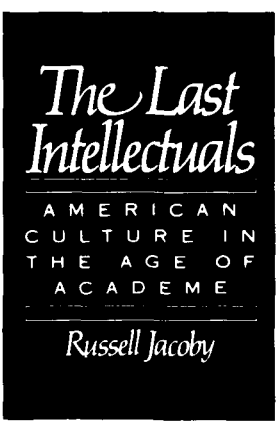
—GORE VIDAL

"Russell Jacoby's book analyzes (and laments) the decline of the public intellectual and his replacement by academic specialists. It's an important subject handled in an intelligent and provocative way." —IRVING HOWE

"Lively and lucid."—MARK KRUPNICK, *New York Times Book Review*

"Deals intelligently with a cultural gap that is both dangerous and easy to ignore . . . . A disturbing book."—MARK CRISPIN MILLER, *The Atlantic*

$18.95
at bookstores,
or direct from
the publisher.
Major Credit
cards accepted.



BASIC BOOKS

10 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022
Call toll-free (800) 638-3030

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN THIS ISSUE:

And we looked up the street to see Bradshaw coming toward the intersection. Nobody understood how he seemed to come down the hill so much faster than everybody else. He turned his handlebars, locked his brakes, spun, spun again and again, and looked like he would have gone on forever if he hadn't been too far to the side. He had to stop to keep from sliding into the steel posts that held up the metal awning in front of the cafe. Angie and all her friends jumped around him like he was some kind of war hero coming home, but they didn't impress Bradshaw. He right away started moving back toward the hill for another ride.

—Carl Wooton, "Ramblers and Spinners," p. 561.

Thus Dr. Jekyll's uncivilized self, to which he gives the symbolic name Hyde, is at once the consequence of a scientific experiment (as the creation of Frankenstein's monster was a scientific experiment) and a shameless indulgence of appetite that cannot be assimilated into the propriety of everyday Victorian life. There is a sense in which Hyde, for all his monstrosity, is but an addiction like alcohol, nicotine, drugs: "The moment I choose," Dr. Jekyll says, "I can be rid of him."

—Joyce Carol Oates, "Jekyll/Hyde," p. 603.

The Anglo-French contrast continues, then, stronger than ever. On the one hand Paris, with its vast pantechnicons like the Louvre, the Beaubourg, the Grand Palais and the Orsay. On the other London, with the rich intimacies of the National Gallery, the Wallace, the Turner and the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. It is a contrast evidently built to last. . . . Two great cities of light maintain their ancient rivalry, after a fashion, and their ancient difference of temperament remains. Paris is grand, London cosy. But they contest the palm as friends now, and as neighbors, allies and lovers.

—George Watson, "Cities of Light," p. 543.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED